



MENDOCINO COUNTY, CA

Mendocino County achieves certified Blue Zones Community® designation by investing in well-being for a more livable, vibrant, and healthy future.

A PROUD BLUE ZONES COMMUNITY



BLUE ZONES PROJECT



CONGRATULATIONS MENDOCINO COUNTY, FOR PUTTING WELL-BEING ON THE MAP !

In Mendocino County, we are seizing every opportunity to move well-being in the right direction and transform well-being across our community.

After launching Blue Zones Project[®], we've seen community well-being, financial well-being, and exercise rates increase, with more individuals thriving in life evaluation, while obesity rates are on the decline. Community 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. Mendocino County 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 Mendocino County 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 2021, with a focus on Fort Bragg, Ukiah, and Willits, a broad base of Mendocino County's leadership set an initial four-year course to do just that.

The value of Blue Zones Project is measured by the engagement of its citizens; the number, type, and scope of semi-permanent and permanent changes implemented; the prevalence and incidence rates of lifestyle risks and disease; and measurable improvements in well-being; all of which ultimately led to lower

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

Since 2021, Mendocino County has undergone its own community transformation, exceeding targets set to engage individuals and organizations and to implement 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 all five key well-being areas measured by the CWBI—community, social, purpose, physical, and financial—in addition to improvements across nine community selected measures.

A broad coalition has supported Mendocino County's efforts to adopt over 70 policies, plans and tools—like the Mendocino County Tobacco Policy Platform and updated smoking control ordinances—which will guide future decision-making toward an even more vibrant and active future. This work was bolstered by more than \$5.3 million in grant funding secured with the support of Blue Zones Project.

The return on investment has and will continue to manifest. The semi-permanent and permanent changes already made compound over time, producing greater future returns for Mendocino County. Return on investment

can be measured in a myriad of ways, as the value captured is unique to each citizen, family, and organization. In this way, Mendocino County has been enriched as a “choice community”—a place where more people and businesses decide to be.

With sustained momentum, continued implementation of policies and plans, and project advancement in key areas, Mendocino County stands to further improve community well-being in its next phase of work.

More than four years ago, when Blue Zones Project first engaged Mendocino County leadership, we collectively established an ambitious plan for the entire county to become a certified Blue Zones Community. Today, Mendocino is a new benchmark for what bold leaders across the state and country can achieve when they invest in the health and well-being of their citizens. Congratulations for creating an even better Mendocino County!



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:

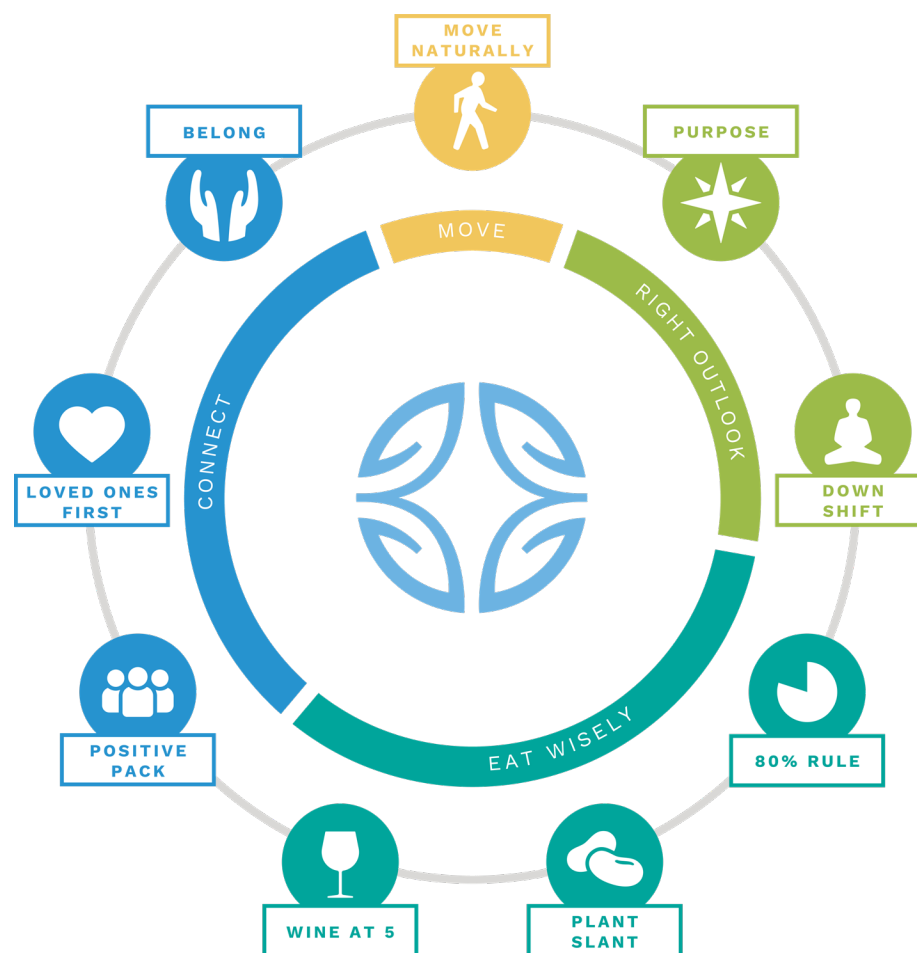
Move Naturally. Homes, communities, and workplaces are designed to nudge people into physical activity. Focus should be given to favorite activities, as individuals are more likely to practice them regularly. For example: gardening, walking, or biking to run errands, and playing with one’s family are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



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.

At the start of Mendocino County’s certification measurement window in 2023, the overall community well-being sat at 64.9 according to Sharecare Community Well-Being Index (CWBI) data. Today, overall well-being in Mendocino County is 66.4, a 1.5-point increase. This improvement highlights intentional efforts to improve the health of people who call Mendocino County home.

Note: The Blue Zones Project Mendocino County project area includes the communities of Fort Bragg, Ukiah, and Willits, with selected policy initiatives focused county-wide. The measurement window assessed for certification included mRAT responses between 2023 and 2025.

Well-Being on the Rise in
Mendocino County

	2023	2025	Point Change
Overall Well-Being Score	64.9	66.4	1.5 ↑
Community Well-Being	64.8	67.1	2.3 ↑
Social Well-Being	64.1	67.8	3.7 ↑
Purpose Well-Being	64.0	65.5	1.5 ↑
Physical Well-Being	65.2	66.0	0.8 ↑
Financial Well-Being	60.9	62.2	1.3 ↑





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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 MENDOCINO COUNTY

Mendocino County community members transform well-being with Blue Zones Project.

Mendocino County 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.

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

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WE ARE TAKING THE BLUEPRINT OF BLUE ZONES AND MAKING IT WORK HERE FOR US, UTILIZING THE RESOURCES AND RESEARCH OF THIS HUGE EFFORT AND SHARING IT WITHIN MENDOCINO COUNTY TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

Tina Tyler-O'Shea, Executive Director, Blue Zones Project Mendocino County

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 participated in Blue Zones Project Mendocino County: some 10,010 residents. Many attended free cooking demonstrations and Purpose Workshops. Hundreds donated their time to volunteer opportunities and joined supportive Moais to connect and walk or connect and eat 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 47 organizations participated in Blue Zones Project.** Worksites, schools, restaurants, grocery stores, faith-based organizations, and community groups made changes that produced new gardens, highlighted healthier foods, created safer walking routes, offered spaces to de-stress, and energized employees, members, and residents through purpose and new connections.



From a policy standpoint, Mendocino County is creating, supporting, and implementing:

- The Mendocino County Tobacco Policy Platform: a science-backed tool that unites partner organizations around a shared policy agenda to reduce tobacco-related harm.
- The Mendocino County Food Policy Council (MCFPC), which collaborates with local food producers, businesses, institutions, farmers, and the general public to create a sustainable food system that reduces hunger, bolsters health and expands economic vitality.
- The updated Mendocino County Tobacco Retailer Licensing Ordinance. The ordinance now reflects the passing of Proposition 31, a ballot measure that upheld the statewide ban on the sale of most flavored tobacco products, as originally enacted by Senate Bill 793.
- Comprehensive built environment policies including Safe Routes to School (SRTS), Complete Streets, and mixed-use development strategies.



THE WORLD IS WATCHING

Blue Zones Project Mendocino County has attracted local and national recognition, with more than 335 media stories to date.

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

BLUE ZONES PROJECT MENDOCINO COUNTY IN THE NEWS

335+

Total Mentions

500 Million+

Total Reach

\$5.2 Million+

Total Publicity Value*

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

The Ukiah
Daily Journal

The Mendocino Beacon



The Willits News

THE MENDOCINO VOICE

FORT BRAGG
Advocate-News





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 For the first time in history, our children's life expectancy is projected to be shorter than that of their parents. 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

This opens the door to even bigger wins, like lowered incidences of heart disease, diabetes, and respiratory issues. Equally important is the possibility for increased productivity, vitality, and years spent enjoying greater quality life.

Policies that support natural movement can shift the dynamics in any community toward physical activity. To this end, **Blue Zones Project Mendocino County (BZPMEC) has completed 31 built environment initiatives across local policies, capacity building, demonstration projects, and infrastructure improvement.**



Key Actions and Innovations

- Partnered with the City of Ukiah to incorporate access and walkability principles into the Clara Avenue Reconstruction Project. BZPMEC joined the Complete Streets Ad Hoc Committee during the project's planning stage and secured the services of walkability expert, Dan Burden.

Burden provided training, peer-reviewed designs, and made recommendations that were later validated. Street construction was completed in August 2023.

- Successfully advocated for the needs and priorities of the surrounding Native American community to be incorporated into the Covelo Downtown Streetscape Improvement Project.

BZPMEC joined the project Steering Committee, supported grassroots alliances within it, collected community feedback, and liaised with project decision-makers. These efforts produced a final design that

upheld City priorities while setting a local precedent for inclusive, culturally informed design.

- Provided technical assistance and advocacy support for the Caltrans-funded Gobbi Street & Perkins Street Gateway Project. This infrastructure initiative is transforming the corridor to downtown Ukiah, creating a multimodal entryway.
- Direct advocacy by BZPMEC led to the adoption of Complete Streets Ordinances in the Cities of Willits and Ukiah.

More than \$3 million in grant funding has been secured for built environment improvements in Mendocino County.

These awards are being invested in street beautification projects and road safety and accessibility improvements (including improved lighting, crosswalks, and other enhancements).



IMPACT OF COMMUNITY DESIGN IMPROVEMENTS

City planners, organizations, and individuals across our community have come together to create environments and support policies that help people across Mendocino County move naturally and safely. This work has helped contribute to an 8.1 percent increase in residents exercising at least 30 minutes a day, three days a week.

Pursuing Placemaking Excellence in Downtown Ukiah

In mid-2023, Dan Burden—built environment expert and Director of Innovation and Inspiration at Blue Zones Project—addressed a crowd of over 50 people. Among their many reasons for attending that Ukiah City Council meeting, they’d come to hear how complete streets transform communities.

By the gathering’s end, council members had passed a unanimous vote to implement recommendations for a placemaking project in downtown Ukiah’s gateway corridor.

Rooted in the larger Perkins Street Gateway Master Plan, the work to redesign East Perkins and East Gobbi Streets specifically serves to create a more welcoming, multimodal downtown entryway. Simultaneously, it upholds the City’s overarching plan to streamline the connection between downtown and the 101 Highway.

This is all part of a system-wide redesign that shies away from prioritizing vehicles

at the expense of other travelers. Instead, it adopts a people-centered approach that promotes walkability, vibrant placemaking, and safer streets for all manner of traffic.

Blue Zones Project Mendocino County (BZPMEC) served as a local partner and organizing liaison for the Gobbi Street and Perkins Street Gateway Project, while the City functioned as the municipal lead and implementation partner.

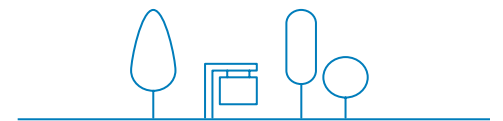
Personnel from both parties had nearly a century of collective experience in street design, traffic calming and multimodal transportation infrastructure. These experts successfully modeled the project after national best practices for transportation planning and complete streets implementation.

Crucially, BZPMEC’s advocacy and technical assistance helped secure funding from the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), enabling construction to begin in 2024. The result is a groundbreaking infrastructure initiative that boasts:

- Context-sensitive design that balances traffic flow with a human-centered experience.

- Roundabout and signalized intersection concepts that account for cyclists, motorists, pedestrians, emergency services, and freight.
- Data-informed assessments that leverage crash data, traffic counts, Americans with Disabilities Act compliance, and infrastructure audits.
- Integrated placemaking strategies that foster a sense of arrival and civic pride.
- Tiered implementation that is powered by public grant funding and aligned with long-term planning goals.

Significantly, this project provides a replicable framework for other communities seeking to create people-first corridor transformations while preserving the City’s character and honoring its infrastructure goals. Hardscape improvements are ongoing as of this publication.



Key Actions and Innovations

- Partnered with the Blue Zones Built Environment Policy Services team to support relationship-building, context-gathering, and workshop logistics. This ensured robust stakeholder engagement, allowing community input to be integrated into every planning phase.
- Partnered with the City of Ukiah to employ best practice design standards and replicable planning tools, ensuring that the project was both shovel-ready and future-focused. Consequently, the City is well-prepared to replicate this model in other high-priority corridors, setting the stage for more innovative placemaking work.
- Advocacy and technical support helped secure critical Caltrans funding.

Together, these efforts mark a pivotal step toward a safer, more welcoming downtown gateway—demonstrating how people-first street design can shape healthier, more connected communities for years to come.



Downtown Covelo Becomes a Model for Inclusive Design

Away from the more populous cities of Fort Bragg and Ukiah lies the unincorporated community of Covelo. Tucked away in the County's far north, it is small, geographically isolated and historically underserved.

Despite ongoing issues of equity, or perhaps because of them, residents have a long history of determined community advocacy. So when a Clean California-funded placemaking project began downtown, many saw an opportunity for meaningful civic engagement.

But, as planning for the Covelo Downtown Streetscape Improvement Project progressed, residents grew concerned that their input was not being meaningfully incorporated. Believing that project design could better align with community feedback, a resident on the Steering Committee asked Blue Zones Project Mendocino County (BZPMEC) for advocacy support.

Accordingly, two senior BZPMEC staff members joined the committee: Executive Director, Tina Tyler-O'Shea and Public Policy Lead, Lucy Kramer. In its somewhat liminal position, the BZPMEC team had to be both visionary and pragmatic. It consistently championed thoughtful, community-centered design while remaining sensitive to the mandate of California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) staff.

Beyond attending every Steering Committee meeting, BZPMEC supported grassroots alliances among members and partnered with them to collect feedback at local events—even spending a day tabling in 110-degree heat.

The project was completed in late Fall 2023 and unveiled in a ribbon-cutting event that December. The upgraded area amounts to nearly a mile of Commercial Street, the main street through Covelo.

The final design includes sidewalks, bike lanes, streetlights, painted crosswalks, and speed tables. Notably, crosswalks and design features incorporate patterns significant to local Native communities.

Though not all requests were met, residents expressed general satisfaction with the way their feedback was incorporated.

This collaboration between BZPMEC, residents, and Caltrans provides a model for inclusive infrastructure planning and highlights the importance of empowering, people-centered processes in rural and under-resourced communities.

Key Actions and Innovations

- Joined the Steering Committee to engage decision-makers, support grassroots alliances, and consistently advocate for residents' priorities.
- Grassroots alliances formed during the project strengthened local advocacy capacity for future infrastructure efforts.
- Attended every community input session, partnering with committee members to collect feedback at local events.
- Final streetscape design set a precedent for culturally respectful integrations in public projects and garnered community satisfaction.

Ultimately, the Covelo Downtown Streetscape Improvement Project stands as a testament to the power of community voice—showing how inclusive advocacy and culturally grounded design can help even the most remote communities shape public spaces that reflect who they are and how they live.



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 support well-being by limiting exposure to second-hand smoke and leading to lower overall use of tobacco and e-cigarettes.

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

During the Blue Zones Project discovery phase, Mendocino County was found to be well prepared to undertake activities related to tobacco prevention and control.

For instance, the local Tobacco Prevention Coalition had a demonstrated history of engagement. This allowed Blue Zones Project Mendocino County (BZPMEC) to focus on enhancing the entity's impact through capacity building and membership increase efforts, along with technical support for vision and branding updates.

Regarding programming, BZPMEC took a decentralized approach to galvanize implementation. It partnered with the Mendocino Public Health Department to train local health clinics, non-governmental organizations and grassroots organizations to offer cessation services at the local level.

A benefit of this approach is its potential to create a ripple effect across the County, while providing some resistance to intra-organizational structural shifts and federal funding changes.

Regarding policy, BZPMEC partnered with public

health leaders, city officials and community organizations to develop the Mendocino County Tobacco Policy Platform. This comprehensive tool empowers and unifies stakeholders by providing a strategic, evidence-backed agenda to minimize tobacco-related harm.

Key collaborators include the Mendocino County Public Health Department, Mendocino County Office of Education, Rural Initiatives Strengthening Equity (RISE) and NorCal 4 Health, who supported platform development and stakeholder engagement while producing actionable, equitable and community-driven recommendations.

In total, 18 tobacco policy initiatives were completed across the areas of policy and program advancement and capacity building.



BY THE NUMBERS

Between 2021 and 2025, the rate of e-cigarette use among 11th graders in Mendocino County went from 43.4 percent to 19 percent. This major decline demonstrates the impact of legislative change and youth-targeted programming.

Key Actions and Innovations

- Enhanced Mendocino County's unincorporated Tobacco Retail License (TRL) by creating clear language concerning Proposition 31, which upheld Senate Bill 793 (SB-793), thus prohibiting the sale of most flavored tobacco products in California. These updates allowed the County's TRL to serve as a model for the incorporated cities.
- Helped the Willits Tobacco Policy Ad Hoc Committee consider and craft TRL ordinance language with special consideration of SB-793.
- Updated TRLs in all jurisdictions based on the County TRL. This effort to create a cohesive, county-wide approach to retailer control has improved regulation and laid a foundation for future community health interventions.
- Instrumental in developing the Mendocino County Tobacco Prevention Coalition's Purpose and Vision Statement. The document makes provisions for youth-targeted interventions, retail enforcement support for underserved areas, and increased efforts to counter the tobacco industry's impact on Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities.

- Passed and implemented outdoor policies that eliminate secondhand smoke and aerosol exposure in Ukiah. These policies cover a range of social spheres, including dining areas, entryways, public events, recreation areas, service areas, sidewalks and outdoor worksites.
- Engaged the Tobacco Prevention Coalition in BZPMEC succession planning to ensure that new leadership accepts full responsibility for facilitation once the Project ends.

Together, these policy and capacity-building efforts demonstrate how coordinated, locally driven action can reduce tobacco-related harm and create healthier environments—ensuring that well-being is protected not just today, but for future generations across Mendocino County.

Local Partners Craft a Shared Vision for Tobacco Control

In late November 2023, a coalition of Mendocino County agencies, public health advocates, educators, and policy leaders came together to develop a science-backed tool that would outline key strategies to reduce tobacco-related harm.

Partners understood the need for a shared policy agenda that would unify stakeholders through comprehensive plans to protect residents from commercial tobacco exposure, reduce youth access, and center both place-based interventions and systems-level change.

This year-long collaboration produced the Mendocino County Tobacco Policy Platform. Completed in November 2024, it was designed to be a “living document”: agile enough to adapt to policy environment changes but structured enough to frame consistent action.

Blue Zones Project Mendocino County (BZPMEC) played a major role in the tool’s development, shouldering significant responsibility in the research and peer review processes while supporting multi-agency coordination.

Modeled after a similar platform from neighboring Lake County, the document centers the voices of local partners while serving as a launchpad for long-term, region-wide adoption of smoke-free and retail control policies.

The platform has also empowered the Tobacco Prevention Coalition, giving members a clear set of strategies for policy advocacy, funding acquisition, and implementation support.

At its core, the Policy Platform outlines a range of evidence-based practices that align with national tobacco prevention standards and local health priorities. This includes stronger Tobacco Retailer Licensing (TRL) ordinances that regulate retailer density and restrict proximity to schools, parks, and youth-serving

institutions.

It also presents robust secondhand smoke protections and strives to embed prevention into long-range planning by advocating for tobacco-related health goals to be integrated into municipal housing and health elements.

Finally, the document embraces equity-centered policy framing. It prioritizes protections for renters, youth, and frontline workers while acknowledging the disproportional impact of commercial tobacco marketing and use on under-resourced communities.

These efforts, insights and considerations produced a replicable policy advancement tool that is grounded in science and tailored to the needs of rural, equity-minded communities.

Moreover, the collaborative, cross-sectoral nature of this undertaking has made tobacco control salient. Several partners are already incorporating platform recommendations into housing, education and retail-related initiatives.



Key Actions and Innovations

- Attended and contributed to every workgroup for the duration of the process, partnering with other members to align the Policy Platform with place-based Blue Zones Project principles.
- Created a shared understanding of tobacco-related policy priorities among coalition members and stakeholders, fostering cross-sectoral alignment and collaboration.
- Helped to shape and edit the final document, offering policy recommendations and communications framing that emphasized long-term community impact.
- Used the Policy Platform as a springboard to integrate tobacco-free messaging into BZPMEC's broader work with schools, worksites, municipalities and community events.



BY THE NUMBERS

Between 2021 and 2025, the smoking rate of Mendocino County adults went from 14.1 percent to 10.6 percent, while that of youths went from 7 percent to 4 percent.



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.

If current eating and exercise habits persist, it is estimated that 86 percent of the American population will be overweight or obese by 2030.¹²

Plate sizes are growing (from 9.5 inches in 1900 to 12.5 inches today) and so are our appetites. We're eating 27 percent more than we used to.

Food is fuel, and what we eat impacts our productivity. 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

Beyond looking and feeling better, healthier eating creates material benefits: an estimated \$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, **24 new food policies, plans, and sustainable programs** have been adopted so far to improve the food environment for individuals and businesses in Mendocino County.

Key Actions and Innovations

- Partnered with The Good Farm Fund to raise over \$50,000 in annual funding for small-scale local farms and food producers.
- Relunched and facilitated the Mendocino County Food Policy Council (MCFPC) after years of inactivity.
- Planned and co-hosted the annual North Coast Farmers Convergence conference.
- Developed a business plan for the MendoLake Food Hub, a wholesale aggregate local food distributor.
- Created internal systems to improve the functionality of The Gardens Project, a community garden network program.
- Facilitated the local application of the food insecurity intake screening developed and adopted by Adventist Health Hospital.

Efforts like these to increase healthy food access and education were bolstered by a total of \$2,294,291 in food-related grant funding won with Blue Zones Project support.





EXPANDING ACCESS TO FRESH, LOCAL FOOD

Over the duration of the Blue Zones Project implementation, the number of farmers markets in Mendocino County has nearly doubled—from 6 in 2021 to 11 in 2025—expanding residents' access to locally grown produce and supporting the agricultural economy.

How a Revived Farmers Conference is Building a Resilient Food System

The story of the North Coast Farmers Convergence is one of resurgence and resilience. From the start, the conference served to strengthen the local food economy by gathering those who benefit from it, participate in it and sustain it.

Each year, it amassed a diverse crowd: from farmers, ranchers and seed growers to buyers and schools. This presented a rare opportunity for community building and knowledge exchange among pillars in the agricultural sphere.

Despite this, the convergence fell into dormancy, leaving a gap that could only be filled by an offering of similar kind. Seeing the value in uniting food producers, advocates, consumers and policy leaders, Blue Zones Project Mendocino County (BZPMEC) staff took a central role in the conference revival process. Moreover, the team believed the event could come back better than it was before. Under BZPMEC leadership, various best

practices positioned the convergence to emerge with greater impact and growth potential. Among many meaningful changes, the conference adopted a farmer-centered model to reflect regional priorities and platformed diverse, culturally relevant food system voices.

With the invaluable collaboration of North Coast Opportunities and The School of Adaptive Agriculture, BZPMEC staff co-hosted the inaugural event in 2023. It was a vibrant day of panels, roundtables, networking and wellness activities that drew over 100 participants.

The relaunched conference is accessible, affordable and scalable. In the last three years, it has grown from a one-off event to a sustainable model that serves to fortify the regional food system.

Moreover, the event becomes increasingly refined and its programming more expansive: from communal, locally sourced meals to policy roundtables and over 20 interactive workshops.

Through these engagements, community connections are strengthened, collective visions are perfected and key insights are

shared among core figures in the County's food landscape.

With all this considered, it's no surprise that testimonials from the latest event reflect high satisfaction. Participants list the workshops and keynotes among their highlights, along with their personal sense of inspiration and social connection.

Key Actions and Innovations

- Supported logistics, facilitated outreach, and directly engaged community members. These efforts ensured that the conference reflects the lived realities of Mendocino County food producers—being relevant and accessible.
- Enriched programming by integrating themes of farmer well-being, resilience, environmental sustainability, and emergency preparedness.
- Helped to diversify engagements, from roundtables and panels in 2023 to 24 workshops and policy sessions in 2025.
- Developed tools and systems to

POLICY: FOOD

scale and replicate the conference, including a comprehensive planning workbook, attendee and sponsor listservs, templated marketing materials, and a structured event timeline. In alleviating the planning burden, BZPMEC created sustainability.

- Promoted equity and inclusion by engaging Indigenous leaders, Latinx farmers, and culturally relevant food system voices.
- Helped facilitate dialogue on land access, farmworker equity, climate resilience, and institutional procurement, ensuring that the 2025 event supported farmers and made their voices salient in regional policy conversations.

Ultimately, the revived North Coast Farmers Convergence stands as a powerful example of how intentional convening can rebuild connection, elevate farmer voices, and strengthen a regional food system rooted in resilience, equity, and shared purpose.



STEADY GROWTH

Since its 2023 reboot, conference attendance has seen year-over-year increase: from 100 people in year one to 125 in 2024 and over 150 in 2025.





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I LEARNED SO MUCH AND MET SO MANY
INCREDIBLE PEOPLE TODAY. I FEEL
COMPLETELY INSPIRED!

Farmers Convergence Attendee



PLACES

In Mendocino County, 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 13 worksites take actions to support employees, from providing healthy snacks and produce to creating on-site walking paths and downshift rooms to become Blue Zones Project Approved™. Of these 13 worksites, four organizations earned double designations for achieving both worksite and school approvals.

Impact of Healthier Workplaces

- **Mendocino College** partnered with Blue Zones Project Mendocino County (BZPMEC) to conduct over 35 engagements, including Purpose Workshops, on-site cooking demonstrations and Walking Moais. These offerings reached over 1,500 students, staff, and community members.

Taking a whole-campus approach to well-being, the institution achieved Blue Zones Approved™ designation for its campus restaurant and incorporated Power 9® principles into its high school program with Ukiah Unified School District.

- **The County of Mendocino** partnered with BZPMEC to refine its existing well-being programming and employee health initiatives, nominating two senior human resource employees to join BZPMEC in monthly strategic planning meetings.

The County rolled out a Walking

Moai Launch Tour across Willits, Ukiah and Fort Bragg. It also installed Blue Zones parking signs at three offices, choosing the furthest spaces to allow people to walk more. Staff also received access to health risk assessments and biometric screenings, empowering them to discover and address personal health metrics.

- At **Fort Bragg Unified School District**, staff participated in various health and wellness challenges as part of the “Teachers Lead the Way” program. The district leveraged competition to drive engagement, awarding a trophy to the school with the highest participation each month. RealAge Test results demonstrated improved staff satisfaction, connection, and physical health.



BY THE NUMBERS

Over 4,600 employees at Blue Zones Project Approved worksites have taken part in BZPMEC activities. This figure represents 42 percent of Mendocino County's total workforce, signaling strong momentum for workplace well-being.

Mendocino Community Health Clinics Champion Holistic Care

Being in the business of care, Mendocino Community Health Clinics (MCHC) recognize that health is not one size fits all. While there are evidence-based strategies known to foster well-being, there are also needs and challenges specific to individuals or groups.

In embedding Blue Zones-inspired practices into daily operations, MCHC prioritized efforts to mitigate challenges commonly faced by healthcare staff. Thus, initiatives sat at the intersection of Power 9® principles and best practices for healthcare worker wellness.

To acknowledge the unique emotional demands of this industry, MCHC began offering wraparound support for staff coping with the toll of patient loss. Moreover, it nurtured social connections by hosting gatherings for staff, family, and friends. In creating opportunities for staff to build and sustain community beyond the workplace, the worksite fostered resilience.

To prevent injury and improve employees' physical comfort, MCHC began performing ergonomic assessments and provided sit/stand workstations. The holistic nature of the worksite's approaches extends to its Employee Assistance Program, which addresses mental, physical, financial, and emotional well-being.

Thus, MCHC won Blue Zones Approved™ designation through comprehensive initiatives that take the whole person into account. Its efforts to ensure that staff feel supported, connected, and empowered both inside and outside of work have made well-being salient.

Such efforts increase the institution's capacity to deliver compassionate care. In this way, the MCHC does its part to strengthen the community at large.

Key Actions and Innovations

- Prioritized physical comfort and safety through ergonomic design.
- Expanded access to holistic support services for employees facing work-related and/or personal stressors.

- Boosted staff morale and sense of belonging through family-inclusive gatherings.
- Created a more compassionate work environment where staff feel supported in coping with grief and loss.

In caring for those who care for others, Mendocino Community Health Clinics shows how a whole-person approach to employee well-being strengthens not only the workforce, but the quality and compassion of care delivered to the entire community.



”

ONE OF MY APPROACHES TO LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT IS TO TAKE CARE OF THE PEOPLE THAT TAKE CARE OF THE PEOPLE. WE CAN'T DO THIS BY OURSELVES. IT'S REALLY ABOUT COMING TOGETHER AS A TEAM AND BRINGING IN PEOPLE THAT CAN HELP US FURTHER OUR MISSION AND DO IT WITH PRIDE. WHAT IF WE CHANGED OUR FOCUS? RATHER THAN TAKING CARE OF PEOPLE WHEN THEY'RE SICK, HELP THEM STAY WELL. IF WE CAN START THAT WITH OURSELVES, THEN WE'VE GOT A PLATFORM ON WHICH TO SPREAD THAT EVEN FURTHER.

Rod Grainger, CEO, MCHC



SCHOOLS

Local schools create foundations for lifelong well-being.

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

In Mendocino County, 12 schools across three districts earned a Blue Zones Project Approved™ designation.

Schools implemented policies and introduced food options that encourage healthy eating on campus, integrated physical activity into the day, and incorporated other Blue Zones principles into the curriculum and campus space. Multiple schools report a range of benefits, including increased focus and classroom engagement.

Impact of Healthier Schools

- **Baechtel Grove Middle School** took a holistic approach to well-being, embedding evidence-based strategies into daily routines. Going beyond traditional physical education classes, the school integrates movement into lesson plans. This helps learners to stay focused and energized while seeing physical activity as part of their lifestyle.

To reinforce positive messaging, teachers and food service staff are trained on healthy meal preparation and the benefits of whole foods. Moreover, children below age 18 receive healthy breakfasts and lunches during the summer months. Provided at no cost and available even when school is not in session, this is a major achievement for food equity.

- **Instilling Goodness & Developing Virtue School** secured learners' buy-in by allowing them to be change agents. A student wellness advisory team was created to lead policy changes. Members from all grades came

together to draft and pass policies that are now the cornerstone of campus culture.

To support mental and emotional well-being, the school also implemented daily mindfulness practices and pledged to avoid negative reinforcement. The latter commitment prohibits punitive measures like withholding physical activity.



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}

MENDOCINO COUNTY STUDENTS ON THE MOVE

Four schools participated in a range of movement initiatives, from Walking School Buses to Walking Moais and Walk & Roll to School Day events.

PLACES: SCHOOLS

- At **Fort Bragg Middle School and High School**, a policy was implemented to prohibit cellphone use during school hours. Students were simultaneously given more opportunities to connect with staff throughout the day. This was part of a larger effort to support well-being through increased social and emotional engagement. As a result, students have become more social: playing together and doing age-appropriate activities.
- At **Sanhedrin High School**, local partners helped turn an unused greenhouse into a thriving garden. Willits Unified School District's maintenance team provided manual labor and irrigation experts from DripWorks provided training. As a result, pupils now enjoy a scratch cooking program that improves their culinary skills and introduces them to healthy foods.

Through a partnership with Mendocino College, Sanhedrin offers an Introduction to Horticulture course and a Vegetarian Cuisine Culinary Arts course—expanding its curriculum and its students' career options. Significantly, the garden yields enough harvest to sustain these programs.

- **Blosser Lane Elementary** made fresh produce more appealing by decorating the cafeteria with BZPMEC marketing materials. This messaging was

reinforced by policy changes that halted the use of food rewards and junk food-based fundraisers.

The school also integrates lessons on healthy eating and positive lifestyle choices into its curriculum year-round, empowering students to be consistent. To foster natural movement, an adult provides supervision along a commonly used cross-town route, so that students are safer walking home from school.



Fort Bragg Unified Earns District-Wide Approval

Fort Bragg Unified School District

(FBUSD) has never let size get in the way of ambition. Though its numbers are certainly modest—6 public schools, 129 teachers and less than 2,000 pupils—this was hardly a stumbling block to district leaders.

Instead, it allowed them to take a comprehensive approach: birthing cohesive efforts, strategic partnerships and engagements that left no school behind. Before Blue Zones Project initiatives began, the district launched “Teachers Lead the Way”. This program prepared teachers to model healthy habits in classrooms while building their excitement for forthcoming engagements.

With educators on board, the deep work ensued. The Blue Zones Project Mendocino County (BZPMEC) team helped FBUSD revive its Health and Wellness Committee. Having a centralized entity devoted to student well-being made it easier to plan

and execute initiatives and events.

With a BZPMEC representative on board, the committee worked to refine the district’s Wellness Policy. Updated in April 2024, it is expansive and groundbreaking in its wealth of supplementary resources. These materials provide clear, actionable guidelines that caregivers, teachers, superintendents and cafeteria staff can use to champion student well-being in their area of influence.

Notably, the supplementary materials were published in English and Spanish, and made freely available online, supporting equitable access. BZPMEC provided resources and training to ensure that Policy guidelines support both academic achievement and long-term well-being.

The district’s innovative partnership with Noyo Food Forest is another standout achievement. FBUSD uses produce from the on-site farm to make scratch-cooked meals that support growth and development.

The program is equally notable for its equity-conscious engagement of local farmers. Instead of paying the district to use the land, they pledge a portion of

their harvest to school cafeterias. This arrangement benefits farmers who cannot afford to buy their own land and see limited opportunity as a result.

Beyond all this, the district partnered with BZPMEC for a range of engagements that aligned with well-being best practices, from National Walk & Roll to School Day to Purpose Workshops, cooking labs and family-friendly wellness events.

Thanks to these comprehensive efforts, all six district schools earned Blue Zones Project Approved™ designation by July 2025. Moreover, FBUSD became the first district in Mendocino County to win school and worksite designation.

By embedding health and connection into policy and daily practice, this district created a culture of well-being that benefits staff, students, and families alike.

Key Actions and Innovations

- Provided resources and training to ensure that the updated Wellness Policy aligns with Blue Zones principles.

PLACES: SCHOOLS

- Aided the relaunch of FBUSD's Health and Wellness Committee, which now includes a BZPMEC representative and meets every quarter.
- Held mixed-grade Purpose Workshops at Big Picture Fort Bragg school, helping students discover their gifts and build resilience. BZPMEC's Michelle Duarte led the sessions and curated a diverse list of guest speakers.
- Partnered with Redwood Elementary to host a two-night positive parenting event that empowered caregivers to embrace health and well-being principles at home.
- Supported National Walk & Roll to School Day events at Redwood and Dana Gray elementary schools, providing rewards for participating students.
- Brought a 10-week cooking lab to Big Picture Fort Bragg School. When the engagement ended, BZPMEC partnered with Fort Bragg Food Bank and Harvest Market to donate food for a celebratory feast attended by over 50 school employees.

By turning limited scale into a strength, Fort Bragg Unified School District demonstrates how intentional leadership, equitable partnerships, and policy-driven action can create a lasting culture of well-being—nurturing healthier students, supported educators, and stronger families across the community.



RESTAURANTS

Restaurant meals can weigh us down or lift us up.

Without accounting for an appetizer or dessert the typical American entree weighs in at 1,000 calories.²⁴ For the average adult, eating out just once a week roughly translates to a two pound weight gain per year. Yet evidence indicates that 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 meals prepared outside the home, it's important that restaurants make healthy choices easier for customers by offering healthy entrees.

Residents and visitors of Mendocino County now have 19 Blue Zones Project Approved™ restaurants to choose from, and more than 60 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.

- Nestled in the Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens, **Rhody's Garden Café** combines delightful scenery with home-grown goodness. This seasonal restaurant is committed to the freshest offerings, sourcing ingredients from local farmers markets, trusted suppliers and even its own organic vegetable garden.

Despite its expansive rotating menu, Rhody's ensures that plant-forward dishes are consistently priced lower than meat-based ones. Through the botanical gardens, diners have easy access to a range of activities that support well-being, including gardening workshops, nature walks, bird watching and a journaling club.

- Known for being the first fully vegan drive-through in the United States, **Taste Buds** has earned its stripes as a health food hot spot. Thus, its partnership with BZPMEC focused on enhancing menu offerings, affordability, and customer experience.

The eatery now boasts a rotating hot bar, featuring a dozen plant-based items that change daily, as well as vegan and gluten-

free desserts. This is complemented by flexible serving sizes with different price points. This way, guests are empowered to make choices that align with their budgets and their appetites.

- **Cucina Verona Ristorante** and **Patrona Restaurant and Lounge** are both committed to using locally sourced ingredients, but neither establishment is content to stop there. Instead, they have taken extra steps to refine the dining experience. Patrona established a farm to supply some of its own produce, while Cucina Verona enhanced the freshness of its meals by making them to order.

Both restaurants promote mindful eating by prominently featuring healthy options. Moreover, they intentionally position themselves as spaces for social connection, even participating in Wine @ 5 gatherings.

- Moving beyond the plate and into the community, **Café 1** has become a hub for connection and civic engagement—launching a Walking Moai, co-hosting cooking demos with BZPMEC, and actively advocating for wellness-centered policies while mentoring peers.



Adventist Health's Roots Restaurant is a Hidden Gem

In most small cities, word tends to get around. As tales are told and recommendations made, local hot spots are created. It's no different in Willits, where a restaurant inside Adventist Health Howard Memorial is somehow both a hidden gem and an open secret.

From breakfast to dinner, Roots serves hospital patients and staff, plus a steady stream of locals in search of good food. By incorporating healthy options and mindfulness principles into its menu planning, the restaurant caught the attention of the Blue Zones Project Mendocino County (BZPMEC) team, kick starting the journey to approval.

Among its standout features, Roots has a nutritional services team that works to uphold food standards and partners with the Frank R. Howard Foundation's Commonwealth Garden to supply fresh, local produce. Hospital visitors can even enjoy this five-acre organic farm, which

was specifically created to support the eatery's farm-to-table initiative.

Priding itself on variety and accessibility, Roots offers vegetarian, meat-based and vegan options at affordable prices. Its seasonal menu is built around its garden harvest, giving patrons a range of options to explore over time. Roots became a Blue Zones Approved™ restaurant in October 2023.

Key Actions and Innovations

- Prioritizes fresh, scratch-cooked meals, avoiding processed and pre-prepared foods wherever feasible.
- Maintains a seasonal menu using produce from its own organic garden.
- Embraces plant-forward principles, providing daily vegetarian alternatives to animal protein.
- Most meals contain moderate amounts of fat and sodium.

Adventist Health is proving that thoughtful defaults can transform everyday meals into everyday well-being.

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PROVIDING ACCESS
TO HEALTHY,
REASONABLY PRICED
FOOD IS IMPORTANT
IN OUR COMMUNITY.
WHEN MAKING THESE
FOODS, OUR TEAM
IS CONTINUOUSLY
IMPLEMENTING
BEST PRACTICES TO
PRODUCE NUTRITIOUS,
SUSTAINABLE MEALS
THAT HELP OTHERS
LIVE LONGER AND
BETTER.

Shelby White, Marketing &
Communications Manager,
Adventist Health Howard
Memorial



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 Mendocino County created awareness around these issues, and

three local grocers took steps to implement best practices and become Blue Zones Project Approved™ grocery stores.

Ukiah Natural Foods (UNF) made quick progress toward restaurant approval and gradually worked toward grocery store approval thereafter. Although a change in management slowed the latter process, UNF was already aligned with core Blue Zones principles, keeping local produce and healthy prepared meals in stock.

Thus, this grocer's partnership with Blue Zones Project focused on retail environment enhancements like plant-forward promotions, healthy food signage and healthy product placement strategies.

Harvest Market mitigated barriers to healthy eating by implementing the SNAP Double Up Food Bucks (DUFb) program at both its store locations. Since DUFb enables SNAP/CalFresh customers to double their purchasing power when acquiring local produce, California-grown fruits and vegetables now account for 35% of this grocer's total fresh produce sales.

By reshaping retail environments and expanding access to fresh, affordable foods, these local grocery partners show how everyday shopping spaces can become powerful drivers of healthier choices—and, in turn, stronger community well-being.



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



Intentionality Fosters Food Equity at Harvest Market

Harvest Market has always maintained a growth mindset. Starting with a single location in 1985, this family business now has two stores in Fort Bragg and Mendocino. This foundational belief in multiplication has permeated other aspects of the business, inspiring leaders to embrace the Double Up Food Bucks (DUFb) program.

By matching each dollar that SNAP/CalFresh users spend on locally grown produce, DUFb allows shoppers to get more for less. Beyond incentivizing people to purchase nutritious items, this fosters equity by promoting food security. Affordability is often an access barrier to healthy eating, particularly when other priority

expenses like housing and childcare are high.

In the most recent Community Health Assessment, 71% of Mendocino County respondents cited affordable housing as a major quality of life issue. By making nutritious meals more affordable, Harvest Market helps customers stretch their food budgets as the cost of living rises.

Beyond DUFb participation, this grocer partnered with Blue Zones Project Mendocino County (BZPMEC) to employ evidence-based strategies that center healthier items and position them as the convenient choice.

Staff spotlighted better-for-you options by placing produce at the front of the store, removed all sugary beverages from checkout lanes, and debuted a healthy Blue Zones Checkout Lane.

With help from BZPMEC, Harvest Market also used product promotions and in-store messaging to educate patrons about healthier choices, thereby empowering them to create long-term habit change.

These intentional, strategic efforts made Harvest Market the first Blue Zones Approved™ grocery store in Fort Bragg. To sustain its impact, the business has committed to

ongoing DUFb participation, maintaining its healthy checkout lane and continuing to source and promote both local and organic products.

Key Actions and Innovations

- Participated in the California Double Up Food Bucks program, expanding SNAP/CalFresh recipients' access to fresh fruits and vegetables
- Increased alignment between retail practices and regional public health priorities.
- Made healthy foods more visible and convenient by placing them at key decision points (i.e., store entrances and checkout lanes).
- Became the first grocery store in Fort Bragg to receive Blue Zones Project Approved™ designation.



BY THE NUMBERS

Harvest Market reports \$226,037 in total DUFb transactions since it implemented the program, demonstrating a strong demand for nutritious, locally grown foods..



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

In Mendocino County, people of all ages, cultures, and backgrounds united to affect positive change in their communities through Blue Zones Project. From the program's initial launch in 2021 to its community certification in 2026:

10,010

individuals involved in the Project.

406

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

482

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

470

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

2,500

individuals attended free plant-based cooking classes offered in the community.



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

Move more. Over **36 Walking Moais** were created throughout the community, building long-lasting friendships while exploring our region on foot.

Eat better. A total of **68 cooking classes and demonstrations brought people together** to learn to cook new plant-based dishes.

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 **482 people sought to discover their gifts at a Purpose Workshop** and put their skills to work by giving back to Mendocino County through volunteer work. **With over 28 volunteer events and more than 1,800 hours donated, volunteers in Mendocino County have generated at least \$72,252 in value for the community.**³¹

Today, **73.3 percent of Mendocino County residents report they are thriving in life, compared to 72.3 percent in 2023.**



WHY IT MATTERS

Residents across Mendocino County are feeling the effects of positive change, and the community is taking note. Today, 73.4 percent of adults report liking what they do every day, up from 70.1 percent in 2023.

In Full Bloom at Flourish & Flow

When we hear the word flourish, various ideas come to mind. We think, “grow,” “thrive,” or even “prosper”—often forgetting a crucial component. To thrive is to excel due to favorable conditions. Blooming as an outcome of the soil.

In a world that sometimes forgets that context matters, Flourish & Flow Mendo understands—its business model is based on creating the right conditions: those that serve a range of people, priorities and needs.

Thus, the Willits-based enterprise is both a wellness and fitness studio, offering everything from traditional workout classes to massage therapy to Japanese and Afro-Brazilian martial arts. To ensure that no age group is left behind, it also has movement classes tailored to kids and older adults.

On the wellness front, Flourish & Flow hosts well-being workshops and social gatherings, where patrons enjoy tasty mocktails and teas. These events take the focus off

the physical body, embracing a holistic perspective that values joy, engagement and belonging.

In collaboration with Blue Zones Project Mendocino County (BZPMEC) and Mendocino County Public Health’s CalFresh Healthy Living Program, the studio hosted six free Movement Moais that brought even more value to Willits.

Over 10–20 weeks, more than 160 participants took part in Dance Fit, Groove, the Willits Wilderness Wanderers Walking Moai, and Zumba Gold (a low-impact iteration that is more accessible to beginners and mature adults).

The Movement Moais were an undeniable success, with the popular Dance Fit class drawing over 60 participants. Beyond helping people get active, these events fostered relationships built on encouragement, mutual goals and shared victories.

In this way, what looked like a simple fitness initiative was really an opportunity for the people of Willits to bloom where they are planted.

Key Actions and Innovations

- Partnered with BZPMEC to host 6 Movement Moais, serving over 160 unique individuals.
- Became a gathering place where participants create bonds, provide mutual support and cultivate joy through movement.
- Leveraged class variety and creative programming to support people of various backgrounds, fitness levels and life stages.
- Fostered emotional well-being through massage therapy and workshops that support mental health.
- Hosted Friday Night Pop Ups, social events that strengthened friendships and connections beyond the studio.





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IT'S NOT JUST FITNESS, IT'S SHOWING UP FOR ONE ANOTHER. IT'S SHARED VICTORIES AND SWEATY HIGH-FIVES. IT'S BIRTHDAYS, BABIES, STRUGGLES AND TRIUMPHS. IT'S COMMUNITY, CONNECTION, AND THE REMINDER THAT WE'RE STRONGER TOGETHER.

Amy Bozzo, DanceFit Instructor, Flourish & Flow Mendo

Muévete Por Tu Salud Makes Everything Count

There's an old adage that warns us not to discount small beginnings. In Ukiah, Muévete Por Tu Salud has proven the proverb true. It all started when three friends approached the Blue Zones Project Mendocino County (BZPMEC) team, looking to launch a Purpose Moai® for working women.

The founders hoped to attract participants who were interested in rediscovering their purpose and enjoying movement in a group setting. While they rightly discerned the need for these offerings, they needed help to execute the vision.

Accordingly, BZPMEC supported the purpose-finding component by providing guidance, workshops and resources. Moreover, the team provided logistics support and engaged the BZPMEC project sponsor, Adventist Health, who generously provided a gathering space for ongoing use.

Under these conditions, the initiative gained steam and appeal, attracting over 25 English and Spanish-speaking participants. They enjoy a range of activities centered around natural movement, including Zumba and other dance classes. To foster sustainability, the Moai emphasizes fun and joy over a formal approach to exercise.

Indeed, it was always about more than fitness. Started by friends, powered by service, and established through community partnership, this effort became just what its founders envisioned: a place where women go to build themselves and each other.

Key Actions and Innovations

- BZPMEC secured a consistent meeting space through Adventist Health, enabling Moais to continue after the initial 10-week period.
- BZPMEC provided guidance and resources, ensuring that Purpose Moais® included structured lessons and discussion.

- Grew from 3 participants to over 25.
- Activities make movement sustainable by centering personal enjoyment.
- Upon attracting both English- and Spanish-speaking participants, Moais were made available in both languages—fostering inclusion, access and comfort.
- A culminating Purpose Workshop event helped participants identify their talents and gifts, increasing both self-awareness and resilience.

”

WHAT I LOVE ABOUT MUÉVETE POR TU SALUD IS THAT IT MAKES EXERCISING AND MOVING NATURALLY FUN. THANKS TO BLUE ZONES PROJECT, IT WAS ACCESSIBLE TO EVERYONE!

Sarah Marquez, Muévete Por Tu Salud Participant



CONGRATS, MENDOCINO COUNTY!

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 Mendocino County one of the healthiest regions 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 four years.

The improvements we've seen would not have been possible without the passion and dedication of hundreds of volunteers, organizations, and our sponsor—Adventist 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 Mendocino County 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, Mendocino County is experiencing tremendous well-being improvement.



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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 Mendocino County a healthier, happier community.

Blue Zones Project Mendocino County Team

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Azucena Chavez-Huerta
Lucy Kramer
Michelle Duarte
Isabel Rorabaugh
Holly Madrigal
Ryan Veness
Victoria Hernandez

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Darci Antle	Madge Strong	Tawny Bailey
Heather Criss	Marvin Trotter, MD	
Jed Diamond	Miranda Ramos	
Jeremy Malin	Neil Davis	
Juli Mortensen	Nephele Barrett	

Leadership Team (Past and Present)

Alexis Kelso	Laurie Browne
Amanda Friscia	Moriah McGill
Jay McCubbrey	Sarah Marshall
Katie Ford	

CONCLUSION

Blue Zones Project Mendocino County Sector Committee Members (Past and Present)

BZPMEC Food Policy Committee

Bhavvy Ducharme
Caroline Radice
Devon Jones
Holly Madrigal
Ivan Pantaleon
Jen Dalton
Jennifer Lutge
John Baily
Julia Van Soelen-Kim
Lily Caravello
Linda Macelwee
Matt Drewno
Maureen Mulheren
Miles Gordon
Pilar Gray
Sarah Bodnar
Sarah Marshall

Tammy Moss Chandler
Ted Williams
Vanessa Jimenez

BZPMEC Tobacco Policy Committee

Amy Menendez
Anne Molgaard
Carol Olivia
Christina Tlatilpa Inong
Dan Gjerde
Doris Sloan
Emily Goldstein
Fabian Lizarraga
Greg Damron
Iliana Vasquez
Janet Knight
Jay McCubbrey
Jennifer Lutge
JoAnn Sacatto
Joe Luiz
John Haschak
John Naulty
Juan Orozco
Karen Oslund

Larry Olson
Maureen Mulheren
Michelle Hutchins
Noble Waidelich
Sergio Arreguin
Susan Boling
Tiffany Gibson
Uriel Orozco
Vince Hawkins

BZPMEC Places Committee

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Andrea Mex
Brett Morton
Christy Wisdom
David McKinney
Donna Pierson-Pugh
Jennifer Barrett
Jennifer Bosma
Jonathan Young
Juli Mortensen
Karin McKinney
Katrina Kessen
Kelly Kesey

CONCLUSION

BZPMEC Places Committee cont.

Lene Vinding
Linda Ayotte
Pilar Gray
Sveta Torres
Trina Seaton
Yuliya Ritchley

BZPMEC Engagement Committee

Amalia Abrojena
Buffey Bourassa
Cici Winiger
Daniel Eutsy
Deb Attaway
Esmeralda Plascencia
Ivon Ford
Jackie Orozco
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Jessica Nussbaum
Jewelina Acosta
Krystal Campbell
Leslie Krongold
Mateo Ortiz
Michael Brito
Moriah McGill
Nicole Bochman
Oscar Campos
Petra Schulte
Sara Marquez
Sharon Stewart
Suzanne Picetti
Terry Toste

Special Thanks

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

Teachers, school staff and administrators who prioritize student well-being in every facet of their work.

Champions who led the work in 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

Adventist Health Mendocino Coast
Baechtel Grove Middle School
Blosser Lane Elementary School
Brookside Elementary School
City of Fort Bragg
County of Mendocino - Ft. Bragg Satellite
County of Mendocino - Ukiah Campus
County of Mendocino - Willits Satellite
Fort Bragg Unified School District
Mendocino College
Mendocino Community Health Clinic
North Coast Opportunities
Savings Bank of Mendocino County

Blue Zones Schools

Baechtel Grove Middle School
Big Picture Fort Bragg
Blosser Lane Elementary School
Brookside Elementary School
Dana Gray Elementary School
Fort Bragg High School

Fort Bragg Middle School
Instilling Goodness Developing Virtue
Redwood Elementary School
Sandhedrin High School
Sherwood Elementary School
Willits High School

Blue Zones Grocery Stores

Harvest Market
Mariposa Market
Ukiah Natural Foods Co-op

Blue Zones Restaurants

Brickhouse Coffee
Café 1
Cucina Verona
Dahvi's Kitchen
Harbor View Bistro and Bar
Jyun Kang Vegetarian Restaurant
Namaste Cafe
Oco Time
Patrona

Princess Seafood
Ramen Cubed
Rhody's Garden Cafe
Roots Cafe
Taste Buds
The Munchery
The Whistle Stop
Ukiah Natural Foods Cafe

Other Participating Organizations

Quantum Level Health

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