

impact

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

Diversity Learning Circle increases community dialogue and discussion

AT A GLANCE

Civic dialogue is a skill that needs to be practiced, encouraged and facilitated. Residents practiced this skill with community conversations on race relations in the U.S. and at home in the mountains of Idaho.

The Situation

Community cohesion and the ability to navigate difference is an important part of community development. Community dialogue and discussion help navigate the future and reflect on the past. Facilitated community conversations and dialogue can help communities bridge racial, socioeconomic and stereotypes. In the West Central Mountains (WCM) of Idaho, a group of citizens came together to form a Diversity Learning Circle (DLC). University of Idaho Extension partnered with a faith organization to discuss national racial tensions. This group met for six months and formed deeper community connections, meaningful dialogue and encouraged participants introspective growth and learning to address individual implicit racial bias and increase awareness of systemic racism.

Our Response

In June of 2020, the death of George Floyd sparked the national Black Lives Matter social justice movement. Local gatherings and demonstrations happened across the country and in McCall. A Facebook group called Valley County for Human Rights (VCHR) formed and 450 people joined within two weeks. The UI Extension office reached out to the VCHR group to learn if there was an interest in



Participants of the DLC developed and promoted the placement of signs in their community to promote inclusiveness.

facilitated community discussions. The UI Extension office connected with a local faith group partner and developed a plan to create a DLC to foster learning and constructive conversations surrounding diversity and inclusion in the WCM.

The DLC utilized curriculum from multiple sources including Justice in June and Coming Together for Racial Understanding, developed by the Southern Rural Development Center. DLC also utilized a book club format with facilitated discussion and diversity presentations and discussions from guest speakers.

Over the course of six months, 15 participants met via Zoom to participate in community conversations centered on diversity and inclusion. UI Extension created a syllabus, organized curriculum, identified

goals and outcomes with participants, and worked with the community faith partner to organize discussions and guest presenters. UI Extension created a flier, collected registrations, and pre- and post-evaluations for the course.

Program Outcomes

When participants were asked if the DLC met the goals of the course, the following responses were collected on the post workshop evaluation:

- 100% strongly agreed knowledge was gained, and dialogue was encouraged.
- 90% strongly agreed, 10% somewhat agreed that DLC created a safe place to share individual perspectives, was a place of discovery for personal implicit bias, and created a space to meet other community members.

Outcomes were identified by the participants prior to the course and evaluated at the end of the workshop. The following outcomes were identified:

- 100% strongly agree the DLC challenged them to engage in personal introspection and have a deeper understanding of own beliefs.
- 90% strongly agree the DLC helped gain empathy for those different than me and a deeper understanding of different cultures and 80% are less critical of others.

One output from the DLC was the development and distribution of a diversity and inclusion sign that “stands with” Wassmuth Center for Human Rights.

Direct quotes about the impact of the DLC participants are below:

- “I am changed! The study I have undergone stimulated by the DLC has deepened my understanding of how we have arrived at this point in 2021 regarding the “isms” that divide us from each other.”
- “I am grateful to Extension office for sponsoring this class because it is all about making these communities better for all who live in them. If I can be a better neighbor to all my neighbors, we will have stronger and healthier communities. Important in that is my learning how to get along — learning to see past implicit bias, learning to look beyond my white privilege and gain a greater understanding of someone else’s life.”
- “The DLC is an important part of any community, especially rural and predominately white communities. These groups promote a safe space for people to speak about diversity, inclusion or lack thereof. Groups like the DLC also encourage people to think about needs within their communities and promote a dialogue with community members of how to make communities more welcoming, safe environments.”

Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

This program would not have been possible without the leadership and support of Reverend Jon Umbdenstock with Alpine Abby: New Meadows United Methodist Church.

Guest instructors included Shoshone-Bannock poet Ed Edmo and Sam Byrd with Centro de Comunidad y Justicia.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Melissa Hamilton, Extension Educator • University of Idaho Extension, Valley County • 208-382-7190 • mbhamilton@uidaho.edu

Jon Umbdenstock, Reverend • Alpine Abbey: New Meadows United Methodist Church, Valley/Adams County • 208-347-2427 • jon.umbdenstock@gmail.com

26-21-mhanilton-diversity • 9/21