

# impact

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

## 4-H teen health advocates are building skills and giving back to their communities

### AT A GLANCE

4-H teen health advocates play a leading role in designing and implementing local health and wellness initiatives.

### The Situation

University of Idaho Extension's Well Connected Communities initiative (WCC) focuses on bringing community members together to direct activities that improve the overall health in three communities. The WCC initiative is part of a national effort to establish health coalitions that can drive health improvement strategies and train community wellness volunteers. Youth play a leading role in defining and directing health activities and coalition efforts.

UI Extension began efforts in 2017 and is now in the second wave of the WCC program. Teen 4-H health advocates play a role in driving positive health change within the communities of Caldwell, Marsing and Preston. The national WCC leadership team asked Idaho teens to pilot a youth survey capturing young people's contribution, skill development and comfort with their local WCC initiative.

### Our Response

Working with the national WCC evaluation team and the Center for Community Health and Evaluation, Extension educators asked 10 4-H health advocates participating in WCC or coalitions to share their thoughts and opinions through an online survey in June 2020.



4-H Health advocates creating a WCC community plan.

The survey was adapted from the National 4-H Council's Common Measures tool to understand better youth participants' experience and what difference (if any) WCC participation made in their lives. The survey results informed the national WCC evaluation team on designing a teen survey to launch with 35 other universities. The University of Idaho Institutional Review Board approved the WCC Youth Common Measures Survey (Project: 20-085). Parent consent was obtained for each teen.

### Program Outcomes

The WCC evaluation team shared the survey results in September 2020. The key areas covering personal mindset, social skills and WCC experience had positive responses from *Usually* to *Yes* (four-point scale of *No*,

Not really, Usually and Yes). On average, teens reported a positive WCC experience and indicated they have the social, emotional, and leadership abilities necessary for academic and workplace success.

Participation of teen health advocates varies across the three communities. Two sites are established and have consistent teen involvement. The third site is newer and building the youth-adult aspect of WCC. Six teens indicated they were *Involved* or *Very Involved* in WCC in the last year and four said they were *Somewhat Involved*. Engagement included participating in or teaching at community health education programs, health coalitions with an adult, the National Youth Summit on Healthy Living and community health projects. Several teens participated in the WCC national or state harvest sessions, community meetings or the Community Wellness Volunteer program.

Health coalitions and youth-adult partnerships are foundational strategies to drive the work of the WCC. Seven teens indicated they are involved in a community coalition and reported a positive working environment within the coalition. Nine teens indicated they feel moderate to high levels of adult support in WCC.

Nearly all teens indicated they feel a moderate to a high level of adult support through WCC. Adults actively mentor teens as key voices and actors and make decisions in WCC activities and the coalitions.

## The Future

WCC continues to improve upon delivery strategies to build healthy communities. The teens stated they want more diverse people participating and more accessibility to health actions. These insights will guide and influence Extension’s role in building a culture of health in Idaho.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

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## Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

- National Well Connected Communities Initiative; Center for Community Health and Evaluation

Table 1: Health advocate responses to engaging with WCC coalitions.

WCC Coalition Experience	Yes	Usually	Not really
People agree about what we’re trying to do together.	3	4	
The necessary people are involved.	3	2	2
The person who leads the coalition is doing a good job.	5	1	1
The coalition has what it needs to do the things planned.	3	4	
The coalition works together well.	6	1	

Table 2: Health advocates responses to youth-adult partnership experiences.

Youth-Adult Partnership Experience	Yes	Usually	Not really
Adults help youth think about goals and possibilities for the future and identify steps to achieve them.	5	4	1
Adults celebrate youth progress, strength or success.	5	4	1
Youth and adults exchange ideas as supportive peers.	7	3	
Youth and adults work together as equal partners.	6	3	1