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Getting healthy together



Ryan Jewel, kitchen coordinator at the Carroll C. Kendall Unit of the Boys & Girls Clubs of the Olympic Peninsula, begins to plate lunch for youths ages 6 years and up. The club, which provides complete and healthy meals to about 250 youths daily, is among the Healthy Community Coalition partners. — Image Credit: Sequim Gazette Photo By Alana Linderoth

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by [ALANA LINDEROTH](#), Sequim Gazette Reporter
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Community health is declining countywide, but partners of the freshly formed Healthy Community Coalition hope to reverse the trend starting with the Sequim-Dungeness community.

Annually Clallam County has fallen further down the list of the 39 Washington counties ranked by 70 community health indicators, like teen pregnancies, obesity and opiate use, Monica Dixon, a registered dietitian, health psychologist and Healthy Community Coalition co-chairman, said.

In 2009, the county ranked 19th, but has fallen to 27th, according to the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute that interprets the health data to rank each county — a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation supported program.

“We want to reverse that trend,” Dixon said.

Mark Ozias, Clallam County commissioner and Healthy Community Coalition co-chairman, began developing the concept of a healthy community coalition nearly two years ago while acting as Sequim Food Bank executive director and has since worked behind the scenes to transition the concept to reality.



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In mid-2014 Ozias received a grant from the Olympic View Community Foundation to support his initial efforts to meet with possible partners and fellow directors of health-centric organizations.

When identifying whether a collective interest to address community health issues existed among local educators, health- and nutrition-focused organizational leaders, Ozias got "really positive feedback" he said. This feedback fueled the start of the Healthy Community Coalition that held its first meeting in April 2015.

"People were thrilled to have been given the opportunity to communicate," Ozias said. "There was significant overlap between the organizations — another reason for a coalition."

Joining Ozias and Dixon, coalition partners include representatives with the Sequim School District, Olympic Medical Center, Dungeness Valley Health and Wellness Clinic,

Sequim Food Bank, Nourish, Molina Healthcare, Boys & Girls Clubs of the Olympic Peninsula, Clallam County health department, Shipley Center and the Olympic View Community Foundation.

The Olympic View Community Foundation grant was able to financially support the initial phase of the coalition, but ensuring the coalition's development Molina Healthcare has since underwritten all expenses.

"As a health care organization they are really committed to community outreach and education," Ozias said.

With committed and supportive partners like Molina Healthcare, Olympic Medical Center and the county health department outside the Sequim region, the "possibility exists" but no plans have been made to extend the coalition's focus countywide yet, Ozias said.

"The coalition decided early on to focus on the Sequim-Dungeness Valley as its starting point because we wanted to be successful and effective," he said.

Ready, Set, Go! 5210

Having a tangible geographic focus and the Healthy Community Coalition established, its partners were ready to collectively address local health issues primarily related to food and exercise, like obesity.

"When the Healthy Community Coalition formed we were seeking something to do with our stakeholders that would resonate with them," Ozias said.

Relying on her past 15 years of working both state and nationwide on food policy, Dixon introduced the "Ready, Set, Go! 5210" program as an avenue to provide structure and traction.

The 5210 program focuses on five fruits and vegetables, two hours or less of recreational screen time, one hour or more of physical activity and zero sugary drinks, daily.

"In a very straight forward, easy to latch onto way, it addresses the key behaviors that have the biggest impact and can help people feel better, be healthier and feel less hungry," Ozias said. "We know it can change behaviors that over the course of time will start to compound and change statistics."

In 2014, 35 percent of 288 10th-graders surveyed in Clallam County were obese or overweight, according to the Healthy Youth Survey done in collaborations among the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, Department of Health, the Department of Social and Health Service's Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery and the Liquor and Cannabis Board. Similarly, 31 percent of 296 eighth-graders were obese or overweight.

Already 5210 programs have been implemented within thousands of communities in 32 other states across the county, Dixon said.

Dixon helped start a "very successful" 5210 program in Pierce County, as well as in Kitsap County, she said.

"It has crept up to the peninsula," she said. "It's simple, understandable and most importantly evidence-based."

"The fact that this program exists in other communities and has measurable impacts can't be over emphasized." Ozias said. "With this we don't need to reinvent the wheel and we know that the wheel takes us in the direction that we're trying to go."

In Pierce County the program was more child-centric, whereas in Kitsap County the program was



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directed toward adults and workplace health, Dixon explained. In the Sequim-Dungeness area, Ozias and Dixon expect the program to be wider in scope.

"It's going to be a broad focus because we have a broad coalition," Ozias said. "For example, the Sequim School District will primarily focus on childhood obesity because that is the aspect of this program that they are initially most interested in."

Instead of product- or rule-based, the 5210 program is a "social" or "universal message," Dixon explained.

"We need to think about this like a cultural shift in our community," she said.

The downward trend of community health countywide coupled with Sequim being more rural are two reasons Dixon sees the 5210 program as bringing positive change.

"We are fairly isolated here in terms of not being a part of the programing happening in bigger cities, but we're trying to bring about that type of innovation," she said.

Once introduced and integrated by the Community Health Coalition partners in their own unique ways, Ozias hopes program participants will extend beyond the coalition.

"One of the powerful aspects of the program is different organizations can plug into in different ways, allowing the concept to be formally and informally enforced all over the place," he said.

Partners of the Healthy Community Coalition plan to host a Ready, Set, Go! 5210 kick-off conference in mid-June.

"Hopefully, in a condensed period of time we can introduce the community to the program and then help organizations and individuals figure out how to plug into the program's framework," he said.

Reach Alana Linderoth at alinderoth@sequimgazette.com.

ALANA LINDEROTH, Sequim Gazette Reporter
alinderoth@sequimgazette.com

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