

THE BLUE ZONES®

<https://www.bluezones.com/>

Blue Zones® are places where people live measurably longer, happier lives with lower rates of chronic diseases and a higher quality of life. Scientists found five Blue Zones in different parts of the world, and Dan Buettner documented these findings in his New York Times best-selling book, *The Blue Zones: Lessons for Living Longer from the People Who Have Lived the Longest*. Physically, socially, and emotionally these people are living their lives longer and better.

This research, coupled with an eight-year worldwide longevity study, has been used to develop tools and programs that help people live longer, healthier, and happier lives by optimizing their surroundings to best replicate the nine principles — the Power 9® — observed in the original Blue Zones areas. This public-private collaboration around a common approach makes the Blue Zones Project® initiative unique. Blue Zones Project deploys a unifying campaign that drives permanent changes by engaging the business community (employers, grocery stores, restaurants), government entities, non-profits, schools, the faith-based community, the media, and individual citizens.

The Blue Zones Project approach to improved well-being is to enhance the environment within critical sectors of the community by implementing evidence-based best practices. Coupled with an extensive community engagement and marketing program and active support from civic and faith-based leaders, Blue Zones Project drives heightened awareness, support, tools, and programs for individuals and community organizations to improve well-being.

To date, forty-two communities in nine states (including Ft. Worth, Texas, and Naples, Florida) have undertaken this process with varying time frames for implementation. The longest-tenured community is in its seventh year of involvement in the Project and implementation of the model. Blue Zones Project is a long-term initiative designed to drive value over a 3–7 year period, depending on the size of the community.

THE BLUE ZONES PROJECT DIFFERENCE

Blue Zones Project takes a unique, systematic approach to improving well-being—focusing on our “life radius.” By optimizing the settings where we routinely spend our time, we make healthy choices easier—and naturally adopt healthier behaviors together as a community.

PEOPLE

We engage people to optimize their homes and social environments with the Personal Pledge; provide opportunities to discover their purpose; facilitate volunteer experiences to connect with community, and offer programs that deliver support through healthy social networks.

PLACES

We orchestrate a critical mass of worksites, schools, restaurants, grocery stores, and faith-based organizations across the community to optimize environments toward healthy living. By working together to make permanent or semi-permanent changes, healthy choices become the easy choices to make in all the places people live, work, learn, and play.

POLICY

We work with city leaders to suggest evidence-based best practices to impact food policy, tobacco policy, and the built environment. By improving community infrastructure and public policies, we maximize residents' abilities to move naturally, connect socially, access healthy food, and improve quality of life.

A PARTNERSHIP THAT PAYS OFF

1. Measurably increase well-being as quantified by Gallup: The Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index® is the gold standard of population health. This project aims to measure and statistically improve well-being, annually reporting that well-being to stakeholders and media.
2. Lower healthcare costs: Blue Zones Project measurably lowers smoking rates and average BMI, while increasing physical activity and healthy eating, which results in lower healthcare and claims costs.
3. Improve productivity: People with higher well-being cost less and perform better. Blue Zones Project works with employers, organizations, and worksites to make tangible and measurable changes to their environment, thus supporting and improving well-being.
4. Position your company as an innovator and leader in preventive health: Blue Zones Project has a strong reputation for generating local and national press for marshaling innovation, creating healthier environments, and attracting visitors and businesses to communities.
5. Attract grants: Blue Zones Project work meets criteria for dozens of national, state, and local grants. Our demonstration communities have been extremely successful in attracting grants for healthier schools, built environments, food policy, active living, and other community development opportunities.
6. Improve the living environment for the long run: With a focus on sustainable environmental and social change, our programs draw from more than two hundred evidence-based interventions designed to break down silos, maximize collective impact, and yield benefits long after our tenure in the community.
7. Boost economic vitality: Blue Zones Project has been shown to attract new businesses to the area, increase the tax base, drive economic development, increase property values, generate new housing starts, and attract grants, gifts, and funding.

THE POWER 9®: Nine healthy lifestyle habits shared by people who've lived the longest

1. Move naturally

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 grow gardens and don't have mechanical conveniences for house and yard work.

2. Purpose

The Okinawans call it "Ikigai" and the Nicoyans call it "plan de vida;" for both it translates to "why I wake up in the morning." Knowing your sense of purpose is worth up to seven years of extra life expectancy.

3. Down Shift

Even people in the Blue Zones experience stress. Stress leads to chronic inflammation, associated with every major age-related disease. What the world's longest-lived people have that we don't are routines to shed that stress. Okinawans take a few moments each day to remember their ancestors, Adventists pray, Ikarians take a nap and Sardinians do happy hour.

4. 80% Rule

"Hara hachi bu" – the Okinawan, 2500-year old Confucian mantra said before meals reminds them to stop eating when their stomachs are 80 percent full. The 20% gap between not being hungry and feeling full could be the difference between losing weight or gaining it. People in the Blue Zones eat their smallest meal in the late afternoon or early evening and then they don't eat any more the rest of the day.

5. Plant Slant

Beans, including fava, black, soy and lentils, are the cornerstone of most centenarian diets. Meat—mostly pork—is eaten on average only five times per month. Serving sizes are 3-4 oz., about the size of deck or cards.

6. Wine @ 5

People in all Blue Zones (except Adventists) drink alcohol moderately and regularly. Moderate drinkers outlive non-drinkers. The trick is to drink 1-2 glasses per day (preferably Sardinian Cannonau wine), with friends and/or with food. And no, you can't save up all weekend and have 14 drinks on Saturday.

7. Belong

All but five of the 263 centenarians we interviewed belonged to some faith-based community. Denomination doesn't seem to matter. Research shows that attending faith-based services four times per month will add 4-14 years of life expectancy.

8. Loved Ones First

Successful centenarians in the Blue Zones put their families first. This means keeping aging parents and grandparents nearby or in the home (It lowers disease and mortality rates of children in the home too.). They commit to a life partner (which can add up to 3 years of life

expectancy) and invest in their children with time and love (They'll be more likely to care for you when the time comes).

9. Right Tribe

The world's longest lived people chose—or were born into—social circles that supported healthy behaviors, Okinawans created "moais"—groups of five friends that committed to each other for life. Research from the Framingham Studies shows that smoking, obesity, happiness, and even loneliness are contagious. So the social networks of long-lived people have favorably shaped their health behaviors.

INITIAL EFFORTS

Initial efforts are underway to measure community interest in pursuing the Blue Zones initiative as set out by their comprehensive development plan. Phase 1 in this initiative is a Community Leadership Presentation for which key stakeholders and community leaders are being identified and contacted within Highlands, Cashiers, Sylva and Franklin. The purpose of the presentation is to educate, inform and inspire these stakeholders with Blue Zones Project (BZP) research and value, gauge leadership commitment and support to pursue BZP in the community. This presentation has been funded by a private individual. If community leaders are in mutual agreement, then Phase 2, the Community Development Process, would start