Increasing Resiliency of Lands and Waters

2016 NCW Community Success Summit Story Exchange

WA Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network Contact: Kirsten Cook, kirsten@okanogancd.org

Situation: After two summers of megafires in Okanogan County, it is clear that we must do better to prepare for, respond to, and recover from wildfire. A Fire Adapted Community acknowledges and takes responsibility for its wildfire risk, and implements appropriate actions at all levels. Actions address resident safety, homes, neighborhoods, businesses and infrastructure, forests, parks, open spaces and other community assets. The national Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network started in 2013 and included one local member, the Chumstick Wildfire Stewardship Coalition. Many of us in WA wanted to jump on their bandwagon, so the first state-level FAC learning network began in 2015. "The Washington Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network, (WAFAC), funded by the Bureau of Land Management, facilitates learning and provides a means to invest resources in model coordinating groups (“member organizations”) around WA that are working to create fire adapted communities. The project provides member communities with resources to engage with other WAFAC participants, thereby increasing local capacity, and elevating our collective ability to adapt communities’ relationships to the complex fire issues we face.” Okanogan Conservation District is proud to be part of the pilot group.

Challenge: Being a fire adapted community isn’t a checklist; it’s a long-term suite of conversations and actions at multiple levels of community, including private landowners, public lands managers, emergency responders, elected officials and more. Since the program operates in a more nuanced way than Firewise®, it can be hard to communicate what we are trying to do. We are a learning network which gives us the freedom to try things; mistakes are ok as long as we reflect on and share what we’ve learned.

Key Activities:
In our first year, we have focused on the Methow Valley in partnership with the Methow Valley Long Term Recovery Group. Activities we’ve completed to date:

- Provided fire preparedness and recovery presentations as part of the MethowReady program.
- Developed and presented business resilience resources for local businesses, many of whom learned the hard way that they were not prepared for the disruptions brought on by the 2014 Carlton Complex.
- Provided training for designers, builders, and architects about the latest research into how homes ignite, and how fire resistant construction could reduce losses experienced in the 2014 and 2015 fires.
- Worked with the Confluence Gallery to host the 2016 Methow Tour of Homes: Firewise Homes, Fire Adapted Building and Landscaping.
- Shared lessons learned from our post-fire recovery work with other members of WAFAC.

Successful Outcome:
The level of awareness of this issue has increased from tens of requests per year for site visits with homeowners to dozens each year. Further, whole communities are engaging in conversations centered on disaster preparedness. Contact Kirsten Cook at Okanogan Conservation District for more details, and check out the WAFAC website and blog at fireadaptedwashington.org.
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**Back to School Fair**

**Contact:** Stephanie Melcher, 509-764-6110

**Situation:** The Back to School Fair (BTSF) started as a way for the Quincy Community Health Center to increase immunization rates and bring the community together. The Quincy School District was trying to find a way to get children "school ready" since many students were not getting vaccinated by the start of school. Our BTSF offers vendors throughout the community and Grant County an opportunity to share their services. Of course, the backpacks we offer to all of our student-age patients who are up-to-date with vaccinations draw a lot of community members to the event. After a few years we have permanently changed the date of the fair to fall within National Health Center Week to help spread awareness of what our community health centers do.

**Challenge:** Over the years the challenges have changed as the Quincy Community Health Center and the event have grown. We originally started the event inside our lobby area in our old building but quickly had to expand into the parking lot. We are always challenged with space even with our new and larger facility that opened in 2014 claiming some of the lawn area we once had. Funding is always a challenge. Most years we fund the backpacks but ask for sponsors or volunteers to cover radio, water, set and clean up. We often struggle with finding enough volunteers to help staff setup, manage and break down the event.

**Key Activities:**
- Interacting with our community! Letting them know who we are, that we are here to serve our patients and potential patients, and that we care about our home.
- Nurturing leaders. The relationships that our outreach staff build with our student volunteers have often led those students to pursue careers in health and service when they come home from college and other training.
- Our pre-visit planning is the key to our increased number of immunizations over the years. This allows the medical staff to know which patients are due for immunizations before they come to their appointments.

**Successful Outcome:** The event is ten times larger than it was when we started in 2002 and our immunization rates have increased dramatically. Where most of our student-age patients needed immunizations 14 years ago, we now find that 85-92% of our school age kids are up-to-date. We have a wide variety of vendors participating in the event now too ranging from health care to emergency response. 2016 was a milestone year with the center providing the largest number of immunizations to non-patients yet! Overall, the fair has been a great marketing tool for us to promote immunizations, well-child exams, and our clinic. For more information: [www.mlchc.org](http://www.mlchc.org)
**ESL Changes Lives!**

**Contact:** Tyler Wallace, 509-793-2305

**Situation:** In Grant County, more than 34% of people five years or older do not speak English in the home and more than 18% of the population is foreign born (US Census, 2015). This includes people such as Yolanda Ibarra who came to Grant County from Mexico in 2009. She had a bachelor’s degree, but it was not useful in a country where she could not speak the language. Many others have similar stories of coming to the United States where the only obstacle preventing them from earning family-sustaining employment is the ability to speak and write in English.

**Challenge:** Grant County is large (2,791 square miles) with many small communities. A program through Big Bend Community College (BBCC) teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) would need to connect with each community to be effective. Yolanda lived in one of these communities and in poverty even with a bachelor's degree from Mexico. She did not understand the educational system in the U.S. and did not identify herself as being a college student because her English skills were insufficient. Fears such as these keep many students out of classes that can open doors leading to their success.

**Key Activities:**
- English as a Second Language classes are offered in four different communities of Grant County at different times of the day year-round to meet the needs of family schedules.
- Students are provided with language skills along with training in technology and employability. They are also encouraged to explore many professional technical or transfer pathways at BBCC.
- Yolanda enrolled in ESL classes in 2009 and quickly made several significant language gains over three quarters. A year later she had enrolled in BBCC classes at the college level.
- While a BBCC student, Yolanda secured employment with BBCC as an AmeriCorps Volunteer where she created a peer-mentoring program for first-generation students, later working with TRiO Upward Bound. See [http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/trio/index.html](http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/trio/index.html)

**Successful Outcome:** In the 2015-2016 academic year, there were 856 enrollments in BBCC ESL classes. Students earned credits toward their high school diploma and transferred to BBCC to take college-level classes. Yolanda also has a success story after leaving BBCC, which includes career opportunities with progressive responsibilities leading to her current position as the Director of Workforce Education for Bellevue College. There she manages seven programs that help students accomplish their educational goals while providing for their families.

Big Bend’s English as a Second Language program is opening up opportunities for students! Visit [www.bigbend.edu](http://www.bigbend.edu) for more information.
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Daniel’s Birdhouses

Contact: Paul Anderman, paulanderman@gmail.com

Situation: Daniel has a business called Daniel’s Birdhouses. He has Down syndrome and autism both, a relatively rare dual diagnosis. He has made over 2,200 birdhouses. All of them are for one species, mountain bluebirds. He sells each birdhouse for $15. That has paid for the compound miter saw I use – his dad - to cut the wood the right length, and the drill press to cut the door hole. It has also paid for the market tent, the business cards, the brochures, the printed T-shirts, the hats, and the banner. It buys the lumber to make more birdhouses. All this sounds like a pretty successful business model for anybody, based in birdhouses. How did this person manage that?

Challenge: This project started with a middle school counselor, who saw that Daniel liked tools and found a way to create friendships through birdhouses. People with disabilities can contribute to the world at large, can find useful and real work to do. All of us need to find a way to contribute and to be proud of what we do and to think that we, and our work, are both worthwhile.

Key Activities:

- School support. A corner of the school’s resource room with tools was made available to Daniel, and students from other classrooms were brought in to help him.
- Community support. Bird experts were brought in to talk with various classes about birds and habitat and recommended that Daniel focus on creating houses for mountain bluebirds, a species that had suffered huge losses in the 1994 fires around Leavenworth.
- Good design. Tested and effective birdhouse plans were accessible on the Internet.
- Parental support. His dad made a jig, to align the screw and vent holes and another to hold the pieces as a box, so Daniel could put the screws into the holes.
- Replicable product. It was set up as an assembly line process; he could build a birdhouse on his own in about 20 minutes.

Successful Outcome: Daniel was in 8th grade when he started; the project came home with him when he graduated from high school in 2007. His parents have supported his efforts from the beginning. Daniel’s Birdhouses has a Washington business license, he pays taxes, and donates to the Audubon Society and to Hawkwatch International. Occasionally he pays someone to help him build his birdhouses. The US Forest Service asked for 40 of them once to use in creating a bluebird trail. A Wenatchee Valley College professor also asked for a dozen for another bluebird trail. We drove to Bickleton once, the Bluebird Capitol of Washington, and donated one of Daniel’s birdhouses to the thousands there.
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Welcoming New Citizens

Contact: Leah Martin, leah@handinhandmd.org

Situation: Fifty five excited individuals became United States citizens on Monday, September 12th in George, Washington. The Naturalization Ceremony took place at the amphitheater outside the George Community Hall with over 200 proud family members, friends, and community supporters in attendance. These 55 individuals immigrated from Venezuela, Mexico, El Salvador, Kenya, Canada, and the Ukraine. All had different pathways to this country, but all shared the common dream of claiming United States citizenship. They gathered to celebrate the culmination of all their efforts and to be sworn-in as official citizens, with all the rights and responsibilities that come with it.

Hand in Hand Immigration Services worked with many individuals and organizations to make this program a success. Samuel Montoya donated his space at Montoya Bakery for classes and Pastor Gildo Barrio donated space at George Iglesia de Dios de la Profecia where paperwork was done. Zoila Olivares was an excellent volunteer teacher who worked with our staff to prepare students for their exams. The City of George helped by adding the Naturalization Ceremony to their Annual Bluegrass Festival. Other collaborators included United States Citizenship & Immigration Services (USCIS), El Mundo newspaper, and Golden Apple Taxes.

Challenge: As a fairly new non-profit with a small budget, a satellite program in George was not in the yearly plan for Hand-in-Hand Immigration Services. When it became clear that so many people from George were eligible for citizenship, we had to figure something out. The hurdle quickly became: How do we provide a quality program in George, while we are busy in Wenatchee, without breaking the bank? The solution came via volunteers. Volunteers stepped up to teach classes, transport study materials, and support staff members with application assistance. These gracious individuals made this program possible.

Key Activities: There were four main steps that led to the success of the program:

- First we identified the people who were eligible for the program.
- Secondly, we set up weekly classes to prepare students to pass their citizenship exam.
- We brought staff from Wenatchee to George to prepare applications for citizenship to USCIS.
- Lastly, we collaborated with USCIS and George to plan a beautiful Naturalization Ceremony in town.

Successful Outcome: In his keynote speech, Elliot Kooy, former long-time Mayor of George, spoke about one benefit to citizenship: peace of mind. He described it as “knowing that not only your friends and family, but your country has your back.” For these 55 people, claiming U.S. citizenship means that they can fully participate in the community without fear of being separated from the place they call home. Though this success is a milestone, there are many people who will continue to need support in claiming citizenship. This program has set a precedent and provided a model for this assistance to be continued. Visit handinhandmd.org for more information.
Situation: A board member of Quincy’s “Readiness to Learn” grant, Kaye Baumgartner and others worked with licensed Day Care Providers to identify the need to better prepare preschool-age children across the community for the public school system. As an elementary school counselor Kaye had seen the need increase since the late 1980s. Some children entering kindergarten could write their names and read numbers whereas others had no experience holding a pencil or scissors correctly. So Kaye and other members of the St. Paul Lutheran Church began considering what they could do as a congregation to address this community need. They formed a steering committee in 2010 to research how they could create a preschool in their church, gathering input from existing preschools and the greater Quincy community. Along the way they learned how dual language acquisition enhances brain development and subsequent learning during early years. They decided to build a program that would deliver some dual language instruction to achieve those benefits, opening their doors as the Loving and Learning Preschool in 2013.

Challenge: The preschool steering committee wanted to create a program that would provide an enhanced education for the children while fitting within the means of their parents. Kaye started by meeting with Quincy-area Hispanic pastors and daycare providers, gathering good input on how to recruit parents, students, and get the students to the school. Then she and other steering committee members designed their program to be affordable, keeping tuition low and offering scholarships, along with transportation to and from childcare. It was promoted via fliers and an informal video distributed to area churches.

Key Activities:
- Upfront planning. The steering committee worked for two years before the preschool opened and before the Board was formed, which includes parent representatives.
- Made good use of existing resources by remodeling church classrooms into preschool classrooms and converting the nursery into the teacher’s office.
- Hired good teachers and connected them with a successful dual language program and materials, e.g., Lewis & Clark Elementary in Wenatchee.
- Attracted resources from Yahoo, Paul Lauzier Foundation, NCW Foundation, and other donations to help create a playground, purchase a bus, and offer scholarships.
- Fostered family-like atmosphere at gatherings for school performances and fundraising efforts and by hosting dinner meetings with preschool families.

Successful Outcome: Since 2013, 28 Spanish and English-speaking children per year have received an enhanced learning opportunity with kindergarten teachers reporting that those who attend the school perform better than those who didn’t go to preschool. The school maintains a waiting list.
People Matter at Plaza Super Jet

Situation: Fifteen years ago David Johnson and I purchased the Plaza Super Jet in downtown Wenatchee. While store sales were strong, the facility was worn and the equipment dated. Employees were not maintaining the workplace and absenteeism was high. Sixty-five percent of the 26 employees working at the end of 2001 had started their employment within the past year. During 2002, 46 terminations occurred. Our workforce was predominately part time and transient.

Challenge: David and I began looking for a solution to our employment issues. How could we motivate employees to follow the weekly schedule and do a good job while at work? Was there a way to develop pride in those working for the Plaza? How could we get people to work as a team? We settled on the following strategy to meet the challenge: 1) Raise and maintain starting pay above the Washington State minimum wage, 2) Establish a bonus system that would drive pay toward a living wage, and 3) Adopt benefits programs that are valued by employees. Initially we were only able to start people just ahead of minimum wage. Rapid merit raises helped to retain valued team members. By the end of 2008 our starting rate was forty cents ahead of minimum wage. We continued to increase our starting wage to our current starting rate of $13.50 per hour - $4.00 per hour above the current minimum wage.

Key Activities: In addition to merit raises, we suggested employees give themselves a raise. We offered to pay an additional 25 cents per hour to those who made all of their scheduled shifts during a two-week pay period. Twice a year we would match the bonus paid. As we recognized the success of this system the rate increased to one dollar per hour with a six month match. Additionally, we have two other incentive programs that can increase pay by an additional two dollars per hour. New hires now have the opportunity to apply themselves and earn between $13.50 and $17.50 per hour. Those who consistently earn one or all of the additional dollars are the first to get merit raises.

In 2001 our medical benefit offered very limited optical and dental coverage. Rates were high and healthy employees saw little benefit in the coverage. In 2009 we increased the deductible to $500 and began depositing $500 per year into a Health Reimbursement Plan (HRA). If the money was needed to pay deductibles, the deposit offset the increased deductible. Those who previously saw no benefit due to their good health are now able to purchase glasses, access dental care, and pay for family members medical expenses with the HRA fund. Beyond medical, a matching retirement program and an additional week of vacation – for a total of three weeks - were added to our benefits package.

Successful Outcome: Over the past few years the Plaza Super Jet is often complimented by our customers as a clean, well-stocked grocery store with very courteous employees. The majority of our turnover occurs with employees who have less than one year of employment. Sixty-five percent of our team has worked with us for over five years!