

# The Origin, Structure, and Lasting Impact of a Rural Community Coalition Working to Improve Community Health Through all Sectors: An Oral History

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## INTRODUCTION

- Live Longer Lebanon (LLL) is a multidisciplinary, grass-roots community health improvement coalition
- Started in 2017 and based in Lebanon, OR

### Primary Goals

- Facilitate connections between existing partner organizations and individuals in the area
- Create and support a network of resources
- Serve as a community idea incubator with a focus on community health
- Address social determinants of health

### Structure

- Meets monthly, completely volunteer-based
- No overarching organization associated with LLL

## BACKGROUND

- Lebanon has a documented shortage of affordable housing as well as a higher poverty rate than the state average
- The Lebanon community first came together to apply for Blue Zones designation in 2016, when this did not work out, the community rallied behind the concept of a local community health coalition
- Blue Zones is a program available nationally, based on the concept of creating healthy communities inspired by the traits of long-lived communities researched globally
- LLL adopted a similar approach, designating ten tenets tailored to the Lebanon community (see Fig. 1.)
- There is limited literature surrounding qualitative documentation of rural community coalitions and traits of successful coalitions in rural areas

## PURPOSE

- Provide LLL with a document that contains the stories of its origins and successful initiatives via the voices of its members
- Explore how a community came together to promote health and wellbeing for its members
- Document the work of LLL so that it may inform similar endeavors in other rural communities



Figure 1. Live Longer Lebanon's Ten to Thrive

## METHODS

- An oral history of LLL allowed me to document the story of the coalition through its member's voices
- After obtaining a not human subjects determination from OSU's IRB, interviews were conducted via zoom, transcribed, and edited
- Stories related to origin and structure of LLL as well as two successful initiatives were selected

### Participants

- 15 interviewees were each asked to participate in one thirty-minute interview. Interviewees represented various sectors including public health, education, religion, civil services, and business

### Interview Questions

- Interview questions were used to guide the conversation and included questions about why interviewees joined LLL, how they saw the coalition, and impactful initiatives they had been involved in

*"I watched somebody at the first LLL meeting I went to, and they were asking for support, and that in and of itself is such a powerful thing to be able to build. You have to have **integrity**, you have to have **transparency**, you have to have **relationships**, you have to be able to **communicate**. That all embodies the spirit of what I envisioned social work being, in just a communal, relational how do we make this work together and so to me that was pretty powerful to see just a snapshot of all that at a Live Longer Lebanon meeting."*

(C. Stagg, personal communication, February 20, 2021).

## FORMATION AND STRUCTURE OF LLL

- By adapting programs and concepts to fit the Lebanon community, LLL was tailored to address current needs, in addition to acting as a resource hub and connecting members across the area

### Structure

- LLL has diverse membership, varying in age, sector, and professional/personal interest in community health
- The coalition is member-centered and dynamic, being completely volunteer-based (including leadership)
- The volunteer leadership structure creates challenges related to finding the next group of coalition leadership amongst members

### Core Pillars of Coalition Philosophy

- Community building
- Resource allocation
- Promotion of health and wellbeing

## THE WELCOME CENTER

### A LLL Initiative

- Opened in early 2018 within the Lebanon Community School District Offices
- LLL acted as a partner organization during founding, provided support and resources
- Goal is to serve students and families through removing barriers, increasing access to resources, and strengthen community relationships
- Manages over 400 referrals a year
- Connects students and families throughout the area with clothing, hygiene supplies, rent support, school supplies, food, utilities support, and more
- Collaborates with various organizations including churches, non-profits and service organizations

"LLL embodies a coordinated approach to being a voice for all kinds of Health in Lebanon— so emotional health, physical health, spiritual health—just kind of an advocate of health that trickles into all the little cracks and crannies of the community because Live Longer Lebanon is so well represented. Live Longer Lebanon is an agent of Health in each little microcosm of Lebanon."

(T. Grove, personal communication, February 11, 2021).

## BE|UNDIVIDED

### A LLL Initiative

- Be|Undivided is a program concept that involves faith communities collaborating to complete service projects in their area
- Lebanon Be|Undivided started in 2018 after a video about the project was shown at a LLL meeting
- Currently over 22 different entities involved, including faith communities, service organizations, and individual volunteers
- Over 70 mentors meeting with students in the Lebanon area
- Service projects across the school district including cleaning up playgrounds, book drives, providing volunteer support to teachers, tutoring, gardening, and other needs identified by the schools

## CONCLUSION

- The diversity of membership and leadership allow the coalition to reach a wide range of sectors in the community in order to promote health and wellbeing
- There is a great need to foster the next generation of leaders in the community health space and expand membership to youth and Latinx communities to ensure coalition represents the population it serves
- By acting as a foundation for community ideas, LLL has supported multiple initiatives that are now independent and have become LLL partners in their own right
- **These stories of the coalition and its successful initiatives are only possible because of the individuals who have championed these causes, rallied their neighbors, and put their time and energy into working towards happier, healthier lives for their community**



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