

Community Health and Nature Forum May, 8, 2014



Photo: Judy Bluehorse Skelton, PSU Faculty, explores these issues through a Native American lens.

Event Results

On May 8th, 2014, The Intertwine Alliance convened over 100 professionals from the environmental and health communities. This event built on earlier discussions with the aim of finding common ground between the groups around the connection between these two worlds. The focus of the effort is to begin to develop a plan to better connect and promote how investments in nature in the urban sphere positively impact broader community health outcomes.

The main goal of this first forum was to frame this issue to better understand the scope, breadth and ultimate direction that we are hoping this work encompasses. The attendees listened to presentations that brought them up to speed on current efforts to both frame this work and present research that helps to build this case (see presentation links below). A critical element of the event was table discussions that helped to identify community challenges and needs, and assess the status of current resources. The following is a summary of that input.

Opportunities that exist now that could be leveraged:

- Take advantage of changes in the health care world/health care reform (Affordable Care Act). The case needs to be made (health and economic impacts) for connecting the conservation, restoration, recreation, transportation and education efforts of our partners to upstream preventative interventions that improve health outcomes. The environmental community needs to proactively insert ourselves so we are at the table as health care reform discussions unfold.

- Environmental and recreation-oriented groups need to begin to tie their work to broader, community-wide equity efforts occurring with government agencies, community development groups and the non-profit sector, Equity needs to become the lens through which these issues are approached.
- Awareness needs to be raised of current research tying green interventions to health outcomes so it becomes a fluid part of the ongoing lexicon
- The Collective Impact approach is an excellent framework to build and promote a shared agenda and message, identifying and attracting new resources, leveraging funds and organizational capacities, sharing information effectively, bringing new people to the table and increasing collaborative efforts

Barriers to implementing change:

- Research is not as robust as is needed to build this case effectively and these ideas have not been communicated sufficiently to maximize the research that has been completed
- This message about the connection between nature-based interventions and improved community health is not part of the mainstream community health conversation
- Voices of underserved audiences have not been involved or fully heard to best understand how this work impacts their world and how this effort can use that wisdom to more comprehensively inform our work
- Funding sources have not made the connection between nature investments and health outcomes in order to prioritize this work.
- There are too many silos in both the environmental and health care worlds that prevent the leveraging of resources and attracting increased funding and attention to these efforts. Disconnects include the lack of connections between academics, policy makers, health care providers, environmental groups and the public.

Resources currently available:

- Attendees developed a list of dozens of community organizations and programs that have missions or efforts that have potential ties to this work (see list below).

Research needed and desired to help build our case:

- Attendees identified a range of gaps in our research including: sufficient data tying health outcomes to nature-based interventions; developing a new, shared definition of health –a common language between environmentalists and health care; identifying best practices from other cities/regions; and others.
- In addition, ways to better support development of more research and create greater access to that research need to be identified.

Next Steps

After developing this base of information, we outlined next steps. They are as follows:

- Schedule another forum to continue to build the core of individuals who are invested in these ideas, with an emphasis on attracting new voices to the table

- Use evaluation feedback to develop resource lists and potential work groups
- Develop a work plan to move the initiative forward
- Make a concerted effort to further compile the research in this arena
- Create a “theory of change” map to begin to develop strategies and projects to begin to get us closer to our desired outcomes

Additional Information

Links to presentations:

- **Health: It Grows on Trees!** — Erica Timm, Friends of Trees
- **Nature, Health & Well-Being** — Dr. Kurt Beil, National College of Medicine
- **Transforming Conservation** — Bobby Cochran, Willamette Partnership
- **Transforming Health** — Phil Wu, Kaiser Permanente
- **Gardens in Health Care: Rehabilitation, Recovery & Restoration** — Teresia Hazen, Legacy Health

Resources identified:

Health/Equity-related

Multnomah Co./Community Capacitation Center
Coalition of Communities of Color
Heart Association
Center for Diversity and the Environment
Coalition for a Livable Future – Equity Atlas
Health care programs, marketing
CCOs
Dismantling Racism
Legacy Health – therapy garden research
Public Health Division/OPHI

Environment-related

Land trusts
Outdoor Empowered Network
Confluence – Americorps
Children’s and Nature Network
Community gardens/Farmer’s Markets
4-H Program
Friends of Tryon Creek – teacher training
Growing Gardens – teacher training
Eco-roofs programs
PPR – Sunday Parkways
BES – CWSP grant program

Other

Artists
Faith-based groups
Neighborhood assns.
Portland Children’s Museum – nature play
School system/school yard transformation projects/curriculum development
Developers/urban planners
Institutions of higher learning – PSU/UP/U of O/OSU, other
Employers’ HR departments