



United Way of Lane County

Live Healthy Lane's Rural Outreach Project: South Lane Community Conversation about Health and Well-being – Community Feedback Summary

Event Details

- June 21st, 2022 5-7 pm, Cottage Grove Community Center, 700 E. Gibbs Ave. Cottage Grove, OR

Summary

Around 25 South Lane residents and stakeholders gathered at the Cottage Grove Community Center for a community conversation about health and well-being in their community. In partnership with Be Your Best, this community conversation was part of the ongoing efforts of Live Healthy Lane's Rural Outreach Project's work to better support rural Lane County communities through collaboration and lifting rural voices at health investment and decision-making tables. The goal of this event was to provide an open space for community members to discuss what unmet needs they have in their community and share what it is like for them to access vital resources. They were also asked what change they would like to see in the future and how organizations like United Way and Live Healthy Lane's partners can help support this.

Among the four discussion breakout groups some key themes arose. South Lane was identified as a childcare desert and many groups discussed how a lack of childcare access impacts the local economy and community member's employment opportunities. Related to this, the area is struggling with access to living wage jobs and local businesses have struggled to stay open and fully staffed amidst the current economic conditions. This has resulted in many families living paycheck to paycheck and struggling to cover their basic needs. There is a shortage of housing at all economic levels and a great need for more affordable housing options. There is also a need for more coordinated and accessible healthcare services. There are large gaps in healthcare access and insurance coverage, causing long waiting lists for services and expensive medical bills most can't afford. The area needs expanded mental health services, more counselors, and lacks recovery and crisis services. They also have an extremely high rate of emergency dental care use, due to there being no local or affordable options. They also discussed how it is still difficult to access affordable, healthy food and that transportation remains a barrier. The area has a growing need for expanded language accessibility for non-English speakers. Underlying all of the issues discussed was the point that they are all interconnected and impact each other. There was a call for intersectional, holistic solutions and an urge to identify and address the root cause of issues in order to achieve long-term change.



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Participants also offered some possible solutions to the issues discussed. They discussed the need for more funding for high-quality, affordable childcare sites in the area, which a community coalition is already working on through a grant from United Way. They also advocated for more coalition building across local organizations and businesses and more tools to help address the social and emotional health of employees to improve staffing conditions. They also advocated for more financial and rental assistance programs for families and for funding for transitional housing programs to help folks rise out of homelessness. To address healthcare access issues, many proposed the idea of having all healthcare services, including mental health services and dental, under one roof in order to provide more holistic and accessible care. The community health clinic being built in town is moving healthcare access in this direction. They also proposed advocating for the Coordinated Care organizations to contract with more mental health counselors in the area to expand access for OHP utilizers. There was also a call to translate all important documents and public information into Spanish and to offer translation services more consistently. Finally, there was a call for more local and easily accessible opportunities for community members to share their lived experiences and needs, to ensure their voices are heard in the programs that impact them.

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Childcare

Needs

- Participants discussed how South Lane is in a childcare desert, meaning there is a large lack of childcare services in the area. Finding and keeping childcare is a huge unmet need. There are not enough childcare sites and long waitlists at the sites that do exist. This has only gotten worse since the Covid-19 pandemic. Not only are there no affordable, high-quality options, there are no options in general for most families. Especially for those who work evening or late shifts, whose childcare needs go outside of the regular 9-5 working hours window. Participants described how many caregivers are working multiple jobs with no family members to assist in care and very limited options.
 - “I can count in my head the # of childcare facilities we have in Cottage Grove” - community forum participant
- Every discussion group supported the idea that childcare should be affordable and accessible for everyone. Preschool should be offered to everyone regardless of their income; children need it to be prepared for kindergarten and to be socialized. Free and subsidized childcare and preschool options are advertised for low-income families which has helped, but those who don't fall into that category have to pay for private services which are very expensive. There was also concern expressed about the quality of childcare options that are available, recognizing that the makeup of families and the area have changed in the past few generations and have different needs that childcare must be attuned to.
 - “I spent as much as I made on the childcare for my twins” - community forum participant

- “With my job, I’m lucky I’m able to bring my daughter in to work with us...childcare is huge, its major” - community forum participant
- Participants also discussed how childcare access and living wage job issues are intertwined. There are many jobs available in the South Lane area that are actively hiring, however if they don’t cover childcare as a benefit, the wages are not a living wage for community members who have the added expense of childcare. This means that even when people are able to find childcare, if their job doesn’t pay enough to cover the cost of childcare then it is often more beneficial to stay at home to take care of their children than to work. Participants discussed how it used to be an easier choice to be a single income household, and for families to handle childcare by having one parent stay home, but due to economic changes and lower wages this is no longer a realistic choice for most families, leaving many with what feels like an impossible choice.
 - “Parents feel like the world is being forced upon them” - community forum participant
 - “I could not find childcare. Let alone affordable care for my child. It was a major concern when accepting a new position with the city”. - community forum participant
 - “Parents are often judged when they have to work multiple jobs to support their family and then their kids are left at home, which causes further judgement, and when they ask for help are often judged even further.” - community forum participant

Proposed Solutions

- Need to fund more childcare sites in South Lane and pay employees at these sites a living wage in order to retain staff. These sites need to be affordable for all families and provide high quality care that helps children develop socially before entering school. They also should offer extended hours for caregivers that work outside of the 9-5 regular working hours.
- Create more opportunities for parenting education that can teach parents skills such as coping with your own emotions when dealing with a child and prioritizing finances.

Living Wage Jobs and Economic Development

Needs

- Participants discussed how living wage jobs are a huge unmet need for the area. There are many jobs available, but many of them do not offer a living wage, causing many to commute to Eugene for higher wages. Cottage Grove is still experiencing major economic recovery since the loss of the timber industry in town and the mills closed. Now, the biggest employers in town are the hospital and local school district. Tourism has acted as a stimulus for the economy, but tourism-related jobs are often service-oriented with lower wages, seasonally dependent, and unsustainable. The area needs more economic support, for businesses and employees alike.
- The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated and highlighted these issues. Businesses are struggling to retain staff. 8 out of 10 administrators in the school district are new to their



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position. Low wages and the social emotional stressors of the last few years have caused high rates of burnout, early retirement, and transitioning away from the community.

- “People are exhausted and it has been so hard to move through the pandemic. “
- Participants from the business sector explained how difficult it is for local businesses to keep up with the increases in minimum wage and to offer living wages to their employees while still making enough to maintain operations and stay open. This creates a harsh cycle for local businesses where they don’t bring in enough money to pay a living wage and still maintain enough of a profit to stay open which then makes them unable to retain employees and therefore don’t have appropriate staffing to stay open.
- For community members, if they are working a minimum wage job, they can’t afford childcare and other basic needs. As wages continue to rise each year, everything continues to rise. Without a living wage, community members cannot afford mental, dental, housing, or healthy foods. This leaves many constantly worried about their money because they are one paycheck away from losing it all. If they were more stable, they would have the capability to help the community more instead of stressing constantly about money and getting just their own basic needs met.
 - “Unfortunately, it’s the society we live in. That (a living wage) should be available to everyone.” - community forum participant
 - “It shouldn’t be made so difficult to have your basic necessities filled.” - community forum participant
 - “It feels like you’re just stretching that dollar.” - community forum participant
 - “It is astonishing the lack of so much for the working class.” - community forum participant
 - “if we have living wage job, we could balance it all out with our daily needs, food, housing...” - community forum participant

Proposed Solutions

- Create and distribute more tools to address the emotional health of employees and address the social emotional stressors the last few years have put on employees, so that the community can move on and rebuild together.
- More coalition building across organizations and businesses in the community, in order to share and increase benefits and resources for employees. They identified the school district and hospital as leaders for this.

Housing Needs

- Participants identified housing as a top tier unmet need in the community. There is a shortage of housing at all economic levels, and a great need for more affordable housing options. The community has some existing resources for accessing affordable housing including Square One’s Cottage Village coalition, Homes for Good, Jefferson



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Apartments, and Douglas Manor apartments, but there is still a 2 ½ year waiting list for low-income housing with 57 residents on the current wait list.

- “The biggest barrier to achieving any of these changes is homelessness – when people don’t have a roof over their heads, they can’t start thinking about working, buying insurance, getting sober, taking parent classes...they’re too anxious or scared to handle any of that “ - community forum participant
- Many also discussed how housing programs and policies often discriminate based off of race, gender, and age, and the specific need for more affordable housing for marginalized communities including ALICE families, disabled individuals, seniors and low-income residents. Participants discussed hope for a future with more housing at all levels “where all community members have a safe place to live and value in their life. “
- Participants also discussed how senior housing specifically is a major crisis. There is concern about the rising rents in the area that are seeing a 5% increase each year for the senior population living on a fixed income. Homelessness is being seen more often with senior women.
- There was also discussion about how in addition to providing resources to those already experiencing homelessness, there also needs to be more resources for community members that are almost there. Many people are living paycheck to paycheck, and if people are already behind financially one tragedy or financial incident can cause them to lose their housing. Especially given the current rates of inflation and economic downfall, there is a great need to provide community members with financial assistance and affordable housing options before they lose housing the first time as it becomes increasingly more difficult to get housing once you’ve lost it.
 - “9 out of 10 families are one paycheck away from homelessness – we need to stop it before it happens and start to build from there” - community forum participant
- Participants also discussed how political division and communication is a barrier to making changes in housing access. The Cottage Village Coalition was opposed for a long time by those who do not want to see homelessness in their community. Others recognize that those experiencing homelessness are their neighbors and support efforts to improve access. They also reported that there is not a lot of outreach and communication with the greater community about housing programs and initiatives, making it difficult to gain well-represented community input and support.
 - “Housing was a hot potato and nobody wanted to hold it.” - community forum participant

Proposed Solutions

- Fund rental and financial assistance programs for local organizations to give to local families,
- Build transitional housing sites to help move unhoused folks into permanent housing.
- Foster more partnerships and connecting and working together on a plan and following through on housing plans. The area needs to get all of the organizations in the area



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working on housing together in one room more often, so that they can all work together on the common goal of creating more affordable housing.

Healthcare Access

Needs

- Participants discussed how there are large gaps in health insurance coverage and care access in South Lane, and that this fragmented care is the biggest barrier for improving health in the community. The community needs more primary care, dental, mental health, counseling, and addiction services available.
 - “We fragment healthcare and decapitate people and separate their head and their bodies, and create fires instead of prevention” - community forum participant
- With the current available services, many places have waitlists that are 3-6 months long, which can be discouraging to clients and detrimental to health concerns. For community members enrolled in OHP, waiting lists can be even longer to get enrolled in the program and to find places that accept OHP.
 - “Families feel so discouraged if they are kept on a waiting list for so long. It keeps them away from trying to find resources.” - community forum participant
- Participants also highlighted how many people find themselves in the position where they don’t qualify for OHP but also don’t receive employer-based insurance and cannot afford to pay for their own insurance plan or all of their own needed services, leaving them to fall between the cracks.
 - “I don’t have health insurance and I just got into a car wreck, so now due to those unexpected costs I can no longer afford the services I normally use” - community forum participant
 - “After I got diagnosed with cancer I thought ‘Am I going to pay for rent or treatment or food?’” - community forum participant
- Another population in South Lane that often falls through the cracks in accessing healthcare services is the Guatemalan immigrant population who face barriers to access due to documentation issues, a need for interpreters, and language barriers.

Proposed solutions

- Provide more preventative healthcare and services in order to improve cost effectiveness of healthcare services and stop long term health issues before they begin.
 - “Give out preventative medicine so that people are not constantly waiting until things get worse so they can go to the ER and spend tens of thousands instead of going to the dentist to spend up to a thousand” - community forum participant
- Fund application assistors and community health workers to be able to come to the community to help enroll eligible community members for OHP and other available



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services. This is especially important in the immediate future as undocumented citizens will be able to access services that they could not before starting in July.

- The Cottage Grove Chamber is talking about getting a program going through the Oregon state chamber to provide healthcare to small businesses that are Chamber members, which businesses can join for as little as \$55/year. This could function as a collective health insurance plan for those who are in private practice or do not get employer-based insurance. The more small businesses they can get signed up for this, the smaller the deductible would be.
 - In reaction to this news: “I could actually get my mammogram this year” - community forum participant who works in private practice
- They also discussed the idea of having an option where all services - dental, primary care, mental health, recovery - are all provided under one roof. Having all services available under one roof would support a more holistic approach to healthcare. A holistic approach to healthcare like this would be cheaper in the long run, and having all services available under one roof also makes it a lot easier for marginalized populations to access services. South Lane is currently in the process of building and opening a community FQHC (Federally Qualified Healthcare Center) that is moving towards something like this. With support from the county, the community clinic is in the work to provide free healthcare services, including some mental health services. After the clinic is opened initially, there are plans to add dental care and expand the mental health services offered. Participants also hope that the community clinic will continue to expand in the future to include addiction and recovery services, a food pantry, and space for social services like WIC and Planned parenthood to rotate into.
 - “My husband works at night to pay for our insurance – if he didn’t, my insurance would be the same as my mortgage. With the Community health clinic, I would have access to healthcare and he wouldn’t have to work at night” - community forum participant
 - “It’s magic when it’s all right there, I worked at a tribal health clinic and it had it all there...I could help someone having a panic attack while in a dental chair” - community forum participant
 - “Qualified Healthcare Centers become a community hub and a place of joy” - community forum participant

Mental Health Services

Needs

- Mental health services are a great need in the community. South Lane is fortunate as a rural community to have some mental health services with South Lane Mental Health, which has grown from 1 person offering services 25 years ago to now having a whole team of counselors, but it is still at capacity and struggles with staff retention. Currently, they are short 10 counselors, causing a lack of availability for counseling sessions and long wait times to get an appointment, sometimes as long as 6 months. This is a huge barrier to care as it discourages people ready to access services who may have been

hesitant to do so in the first place due to stigma. One participant stated, “When the person is ready is when you need to be available”. South Lane needs more support and funding for staffing and running mental health services and treatment centers, especially for Youth Behavioral health and inpatient programs, which have been a particular struggle over the last few years.

- “I can’t get my niece into therapy after 2 years of seeking support. Making progress with Options counseling, it’s sad that it is so hard to get support.” - community forum participant
- “My son wanted to see someone, but he had to wait 6 weeks to see a therapist.. He was able to get into a physician and get medication but that wasn’t what he needed” - community forum participant
- “South Lane Mental Health is Drowning” - community forum participant
- There are also no recovery resources available in town. People often turn to substances as a “quick fix to deal with emotions” but they then develop an addiction and don’t have the help they need. Right now, the nearest detox center is in Eugene, away from their community support. Increased mental health and recovery resources could help prevent addiction by teaching people healthy coping mechanisms and standing by them throughout recovery.
- There are also no crisis services available. A lack of preventative care and counseling options makes people’s conditions go to the next level unnecessarily and need to use hospital and emergency services more often, which are more expensive and don’t help people with long term solutions. In Cottage Grove, the police department and other players have been looking at a mobile crisis response similar to Cahoots in Eugene, but there are no counselors to meet the need.

Proposed Solutions

- Pre-pandemic they used to monitor how fast the systems were working and getting people the care; it would be beneficial to bring this monitoring back in order to assess wait times and how they could be improved.
- There are only 3 mental health professionals in Cottage Grove that are allowed to accept OHP plans from PacificSource and 0 from Trillium. A solution to this would be to advocate to PacificSource and Trillium for them to contract with more counselors in the area in order to expand mental health access for OHP utilizers.
- Recruit and retain staffing for South Lane Mental Health and the Mobile Crisis Response program in order to increase availability of services.
- Funding for a 24 hour respite crisis center and recovery resources so that residents can seek support within their own community.

Dental Care Access

Needs



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- Dental access is also a huge issue. South Lane has the second highest use of emergency dental care in the state. There are no local dentists, which, combined with the expensive cost of dental care, makes many wait for an emergency to get care. Residents have to go to Eugene for non-emergency dental care, which requires a working car and gas money. For the dental services that are available, there are long waiting times, with some participants reporting waiting 6-7 months for a filling. The expensive nature of dental services makes dental issues disproportionately impact low-income and unhoused individuals in the community. Dental care is vital to physical health; if you get your tooth pulled and you haven't been taking care of your health it releases infection into the body. The area needs local dentists or a mobile clinic to address this.
 - "when I was growing up my mom was a nurse and she told me about a man who died on her floor from heart failure that was due to an abscessed tooth" - community forum participant
 - "When they (community members) smile and can see, they thrive, and are able to help others thrive" - community forum participant

Proposed Solutions

- Need to advocate for there being a dental clinic in the community health clinic in order to make sure that folks who can't afford dental care have access. Capitol & Advantage Dental provide OHP services so they could be contracted to provide services at the clinic.
- Need for a Mobile Dental Clinic, which Capitol Dental has been working on but has faced many barriers in getting started. The mobile dental clinic is currently held up in Portland with a weight issue on the vehicle and then needs somewhere to be able to park in order to provide services. This program could fill a huge gap in the community with just a little extra support.

Food Access

Needs

- Participants shared that accessing affordable, healthy food remains a challenge for many community members. Cottage Grove is not a food desert and has many existing resources to help with food access such as the Community Sharing Program and the Double up Bucks program at the Farmer's Market, but other towns in the region are such as Creswell.
- Finding affordable food at the grocery store is a challenge; a few participants described going to 4 stores in one day in order to get everything they needed while using as many deals as possible to drive down the price and save a couple dollars. Many don't have the



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time or transportation to do this, so they end up eating whatever they can afford, which is often not the healthiest option.

- “I went to Safeway for only celery, a block of celery was \$5.00. You can get a package of ramen and a can of processed meat for \$2.00” - community forum participant

Proposed solutions

- Increase access to education around healthy food as a way to improve access to affordable, healthy food. They stated that if people actively seek out and demand healthy food, the stores will respond and provide it. They suggested the idea to host educational classes at the Farmer’s Market on nutrition, eating healthy on a budget, food preservation, and recipes to cook with that week’s available produce as a way to bring together and educate the community in a space they already go.
- Deliver food boxes through the schools as a way to get healthy food to families in need, as the school districts already have a trusted relationship with these families. Participants highlighted the importance of the food distribution boxes, and any food distribution service in town, to have more fresh produce and more culturally relevant foods in them for the large Latinx population in South Lane.

Transportation

Needs

- One breakout group discussed the need for better transportation to help folks access services, education, and employment. They discussed the need for this in parts of South Lane outside Cottage Grove to the downtown area, within the town of Cottage Grove itself, and from Cottage Grove to the Eugene/Springfield metro area.

Proposed Solutions

- One proposed solution for this was to bring the PeaceHealth Bikes programs to the town of Cottage Grove. Some participants thought this would be a great addition to the community, especially as membership only costs \$1/month for folks who receive SNAP benefits. There were concerns about the technological barriers of the program since it requires a phone and an app to unlock the bikes and potential safety and liability issues.

Language Access

Needs

- Participants identified language barriers as a growing issue in the community. Cottage Grove and surrounding Lane County towns have a growing number of Spanish and Mam speaking individuals who cannot access services or documents that are only available in English, creating inequitable access.

Proposed Solutions

- A first step to addressing language barriers is to translate documents into Spanish and other relevant languages for the community. Translating all documents at doctors' offices, schools, parks, libraries, and city hall would make vital public information more available and accessible to non-English speaking community members. These materials should also be provided both digitally and printed so that those without access to technology can still access the information.
 - "It's a simple thing that gets missed. There is a solution. Starting with that, not just for the LatinX community but for everyone represented in our community." - community forum participant

Community

Strengths

- There was also discussion about South Lane's community and culture and how this is a strength for facilitating change in the community. There is a high level of involvement in the community and people are willing to work together and come up with solutions when there is a lack of resources. Neighbors are willing to help neighbors. For example, a participant shared about a neighbor who is producing too much breastmilk for her own needs, so she has been sharing it with neighbors in light of the formula shortage. Participants noted that the community is often more helpful to each other than outside sources who do not know the lived experiences of their neighbors or have relationships with them.
 - "It's a community with a great heart" – community forum participant
- They discussed the importance of connecting, working together, having open conversations, and forming partnerships in order to form a plan and really make progress on an issue. They also highlighted the importance of talking to the people already doing work on a particular issue first and joining forces with them rather than creating a bunch of separate plans. Be Your Best is a good example of this level of community collaboration and resource sharing. They underscored how all of the issues their community face will take a long time to improve, but the most important thing for making that change happen is for individuals to continue showing up, doing the next right thing, and continue to work together.
 - "Trying to work together and help each other where there's a lack of resources, we will be able to thrive a bit more. Even if it's just in one small area." - community forum participant
 - "I want one solution that will solve it all but the reality is all we can do is that each of us do one thing and then work to do this collectively" – community forum participant
 - "We can do this, but it's going to take the kids...if we're gonna change anything, we're gonna need the kids to help and we're going to need to learn from them" – community forum participant

- o “It’s back and forth connection, you share your information, I share mine. That’s the way to support each other.” – community forum participant
- o “I just feel like our community should continue to connect during COVID times, work together, versus individually.” – community forum participant
- o “Families and people having the basic necessities, it will affect happier living and more community inclusion. With the lack of resources and the language barriers and all these issues. We are all straying away from each other while in the pandemic, we were forced to work with each other. We lost the work to support each other.” – community forum participant

Barriers and Areas for Growth

- Participants identified confidence and trust that something will actually be done as a barrier to community involvement. They highlighted the importance of organizations actually forming a plan based off the community’s specific needs and following through on these plans to build community trust and involvement. They also called for more opportunities for community members to provide their input and have conversations with each other about the community’s issues. Having lived experience inform community solutions is vital. They talked about how frustrating it can be for underserved communities not being able to communicate their needs or have their voice heard or represented in programs that affect them directly. They asked for more local opportunities, beyond city council meetings, for community members to share their needs and experiences. They stressed the importance of having local opportunities that meet community members where they already are, such as schools, park, or their homes, and having translation services available for non-English speakers. Engagement opportunities also need to provide transportation to community opportunities and be mindful of times that work best for community members.
 - o “Instead of people coming to you, you go to the people.” – Community forum participant
 - o “If you don’t build that relationship in the community, you can’t grow. You can’t make a change.” – Community forum participant
 - o “Make sure to talk to people in the community to get the lived experiences and ACT ON THEM” – Community forum participant
 - o “We often hear phrases like ‘Maybe next time’ or ‘We are working on it’ ...What can we do to get it done and not just be in a constant state of ‘Working on it’? “– Community forum participant
- Some participants also discussed a desire to increase volunteerism in the community and make volunteering opportunities more accessible. They discussed the need for more networking and intentional recruiting of volunteers, through social media, one on one conversations, and community organizations. One participant shared how some may be overwhelmed by the demands of a volunteer position and feel as if they have to treat it like a second job that they do not have time for. Instead, we need to “Have people think about the things they CAN do” and highlight how everyone has something to offer. Being flexible and inclusive of multiple lived experiences and abilities is key.