



MARIN 9 TO 25: A CASE STUDY IN COALITION BUILDING

Background

Marin County, California has regularly been [recognized as the healthiest county in California](#), yet despite this designation, its youth still struggle with health inequities. Historically, this has included race-based health inequities and high rates of accidental drug overdose deaths, and struggles with high levels of substance use disorder.

The California Healthy Kids Survey data from 2017-2019 reported that 11% of students in grade 9 and 19% of students in grade 11 report lifetime use of prescription pain medication, opioids, tranquilizers, sedatives, diet pills, or prescription stimulants. Additionally, both groups report using cocaine, amphetamines, and inhalants. The current use of drugs (excluding alcohol) among 7th, 9th and 11th

graders in Marin County has increased compared to data collected from 2015 to 2017. Youth of color and low-income youth are experiencing the most severe outcomes in a county with the widest income gap in the state.

In response to this challenge, the Marin 9 to 25 collective impact coalition was founded, which is now a proud part of the California Accountable Communities for Health Initiative (CACHI). Originating from the efforts of the Marin County Probation Department with the Youth Reinvestment Grant, the coalition grew stronger with the involvement of multiple organizations. In collaboration with this group, BluePath Health facilitated a community-based approach to create what is now known as Marin 9 to 25.



Applying Coalition Best Practices: By the Community, For the Community

BluePath Health is an expert in coalition-building, and leverages its deep experience to personalize its approach for each of its clients. For Marin 9 to 25, BluePath Health embraced the philosophy that a community coalition must be built by the community itself. With a unique focus on youth, BluePath Health designed the coalition to center youth voices and serve their needs.

To ensure that the ethos “by the community, for the community” would be embedded in the administration, leadership, programs, and operations of the Marin 9 to 25 coalition, the BluePath Health team:

- Identified common ground and fostered a shared vision through open, transparent and inclusive dialogue.
- Established clear metrics to measure success in key areas and committed to regular reviews to adapt strategies as needed, regularly assessing and reporting on tangible progress.
- Adopted community-based storytelling to convey the coalition’s mission and impact in an accessible and purposeful way.
- Embraced a nimble, resourceful approach, tailoring the coalition’s size to its mission, ensuring that it is appropriately scalable to achieve its objectives.
- Built relationships with county agencies, community groups and schools to engage and connect with youth.

For Marin 9 to 25’s unique mission, BluePath Health honored and represented the needs of its youth communities both significantly and subtly by:

- Focusing on equity: The Marin 9 to 25 coalition provides Spanish-language materials and engagement opportunities for its Spanish speaking audience, while also addressing transportation challenges to ensure equitable access to programs.
- Operationally accommodating youth schedules: Meetings are held after 4 p.m. to ensure that youth can participate without compromising school and other responsibilities.
- Involving youth in all decisions: BluePath Health consistently advocates for and elevates youth voices by asking questions such as: “Has a young person weighed in on this idea?” or “Has a young person identified that this is what they want?”

Importantly, BluePath Health empowers Marin 9 to 25 youth leaders with support, resources and decision-making authority, from developing programs to creating their own brand identities and beyond.

Connecting the Dots to Benefit Communities and Driving Measurable Outcomes

Today, Marin 9 to 25 is an action-oriented collective of youth and adults in Marin County that is committed to achieving positive and equitable outcomes for youth aged 9 to 25. Its mission is to ensure that all young people in Marin County can fulfill their physical, mental, and social health needs. The Find Your Way (FYW) group provides opportunities for involvement in youth driven projects in collaboration with the Suicide Prevention Collaboration, OD Free Marin, The Marin County Free Library, and other partners. Additionally, Find Your Way offers a scholarship program for youth (ages 12 – 25 years) who are actively participating in community programs in Marin County, or are interested in volunteering or engaging in community work.

Data from the most recent California Healthy Kids Survey spanning 2021-2023 reveals that 6% of grade 9 students and 8% of grade 11 students report lifetime use of prescription pain medication, opioids, tranquilizers, sedatives, diet pills or prescription stimulants. This marks an improvement from 2017-2019 where 11% of grade 9 students and 19% of grade 11 students reported such use.

BluePath Health maintains unique connections with support organizations, funders, schools, and state-led programs and leaders, giving the team a unique perspective when advocating for youth in Marin. Marin 9 to 25 plays an essential, foundational role by uniting young people across various school districts and communities that are often siloed. Through advocating for equitable resource access, BluePath Health ensures Marin 9 to 25 serves as a center of expertise and supports appropriate allocations of resources throughout the county.

From 2023-2024, Marin 9 to 25 has:

- Established and organized the May Mental Health Art and Film Showcase. The artwork is showcased at the Marin County Youth Commission's Wellness Festival during May Mental Health Month. This year, the team introduced a new outreach strategy: An art workshop roadshow to bring art supplies and prompts to youth-serving organizations, primarily young people of color. As a result, submissions increased significantly from roughly 100 to over 350, highlighting the success of this inclusive youth-led effort.
- Held a Resource Guide Roadshow as part of the wellness campaign, FYW, aimed at empowering youth to access reliable support when needed. The initiative focused on distributing the FYW printed guide and digital resource guide developed by and for youth. These guides cover essential categories such as substance use and recovery, mental health, and basic needs. In spring 2024, a project team was formed to begin training peers throughout the county on the use and value of both the printed and digital resource guide. Youth collaborated with the Student Wellness Ambassador Program, hosted by the Marin County Office of Education, in approximately 10 schools, providing training during their spring summit and presenting at a virtual community partner's mental health and substance use forum.
- Conducted the Homework Helpers program: Created and run by high school students and the Marin County Free Library, this program offers free one-on-one homework help sessions for students in grades 3 through 10 at library branches in Marin. The goal is to provide equitable access to homework help for all young students. In addition to homework help, the tutors provide a safe space and develop relationships with their younger students. Based on its success, additional branches have been added since the program's inception, drawing and supporting mostly bilingual youth of color.



- One Stride at a Time: The May 5k walk/run for Hope, Help and Recovery is an inaugural annual event launched by a youth team dedicated to supporting individuals in recovery, including those with substance use and mental health challenges. The student team developed branding, website, and project plans in partnership with the County of Marin, Marin County Parks, OD Free Marin, First Responder Therapy dogs, Suicide Prevention Collaborative, and Marin County Office of Education. Approximately 100 residents of all ages attended the event and speakers included a young person sharing their personal experience with a fatal overdose in their family.

“Probation departments across the state are actively working to make positive changes to the juvenile justice system, but we know the best changes are those that result in youths never entering the system.”

- Chief Marlon Washington, Chief Probation Officer, Marin County, which has led the way for the Marin 9 to 25 movement through its embracing of evidenced-based practices, innovative prevention programs and the “whole person care” mentality of staff when working with youth and their families.

BluePath Health’s team continues to serve as the backbone staff for Marin 9 to 25, ensuring successful coordination and centering of its youth voices and leaders. Today, this work includes facilitating the steering team and multiple workgroups, managing the website and social media, and publishing the monthly newsletter. BluePath also drives a successful funding model through a blend of community, county, and state investment to ensure that Marin County’s youth will be supported for years to come.